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RR
VOLUME 60 ISSUE 2

Letter from Editor

The fear of uncertainty is a ubiquitous facet of the human condition. It's one that I feel deep in my bones as a graduating senior with no official employment offer (at the time I am writing this). I always believed in the power of education— that if you go to school, you will find a job. But we live in a time where nothing seems to be a guarantee. We are all on the edge of our seats, frozen on the precipice. In such moments, it is easy to arm ourselves with cynicism.

This spring issue is a direct challenge to our inner cynics.

When contemplating the feature this semester, we had one goal: to bring back the early 2000s RR experimental zine era. So, we exchanged the traditional one-word theme with a phrase. And I think we landed on something that speaks to the softness and warmth of humanity, especially in the face of darkness. Reader, I present to you the Spring 2025 feature: "Roses are red, violets are blue, I love ____, do you?"

There is always so much to love and be grateful for. I remember attending RR meetings during my freshman year at the student center with only four other students present. The space we occupied was filled with short conversations and long silences. Yet, I knew that as one of the literary magazines on campus, it had potential. On a cold March night, after a meeting that I dragged my friend to, I told her that I believed the club would come back stronger.

Now, I am proud to write that there are fourteen incoming RR e-board members for the 2025-2026 academic year. I love how much this organization evolved over the last three years. I love how after losing the student center meeting space we discovered our creative nook at Murray. I love our last-minute scrambles at the end of every semester as we rush to get our issue published. I love how our magazines grew in pages, becoming a collage of eclectic written and visual submissions. Speaking of collage, I love how we started the tradition of an annual collage night where we make collages and have coffee house jazz playing in the background. Most of all, I love the wonderful, artistic, wholesome human beings that RR has brought me closer to. I will forever deeply cherish all the memories RR has given me throughout my undergraduate career.

Dear reader, I love the Rutgers Review, and I hope that after reading this issue, you will too.

Yours truly,

Sahana Iyer

meet the team

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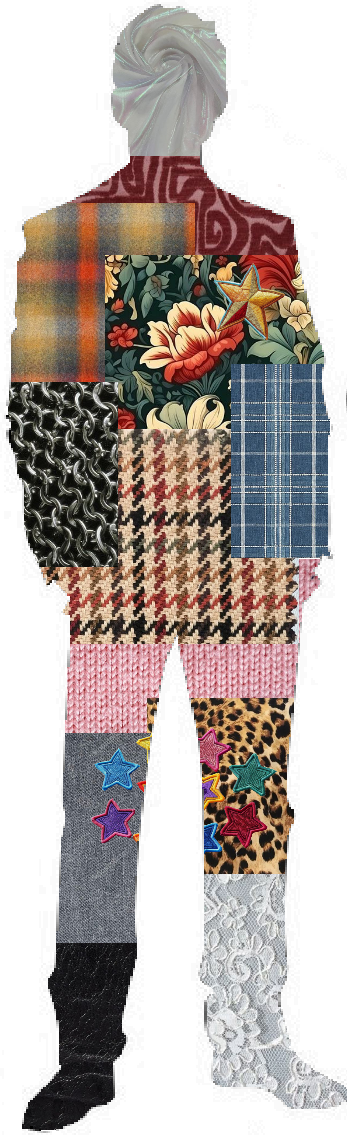
Escaping the (In)evitable Doom of The Repatchening

CESAR URBINA



In the midst of a crowd—a crowd of thousands— you realize that no one looks like you. You're the only person without a black and white tuxedo. You're wearing stone wash bell-bottoms, black western boots, and a black leather rider. You feel alienated. You feel like an outcast—that is, until you spot somebody 500 heads down with a similar style as you. You go up to them, compliment their style, tell them you feel like you stick out like a sore thumb and what are the odds? They felt the same way too. This was the start of something beautiful.

Why is it that something so external like style can make us feel so at home with others who we share it with? Why is it that wearing certain things makes us feel like a part of something?

This is not an expert thesis written by a professional in the fields of fashion or psychology. I've been interested in fashion for as long as I could remember, having drilled through countless layers of its immense iceberg already. What has always intrigued me the most though is not the clothes themselves, but the social consistencies within fashion's many niches.

> ***"To dress up is to put a little patch of your soul on display for the whole world to see."***

When we dig through our closets, cover our bodies in concoctions of fabric, look in the mirror, and think "this is right," we've done the job of an artist—we've successfully rendered our image of beauty into the real world. Art is the conductor of the soul. To dress up is to put a little patch of your soul on display for the whole world to see.

Art connects people. Film, television, literature, poetry, and music bring people together. The art which they resonate with resonates with some part of their soul, so to appreciate the same kind of art as someone is to appreciate some part of their soul. To share style with somebody is to display coordinating soul patches for the whole world to see.

.

Could there be a downside to such an innocent intertwining of souls? I think: maybe. I think an issue arises when we start to look at the patches of others and think “Theirs is a little cooler than mine. Tomorrow, I think I’ll wear one that looks more like theirs.” This happens a LOT. Pinterest is a notorious goldmine for fashion inspiration, and there’s nothing wrong with scavenging for inspiration to find ways to evolve your style, but there may be when you start using it to replace it.

“B-b-but... it’s just clothes! It’s not a big deal!”

Well, it can be. We identify with the clothes we wear, to the most insignificant degree at the very least. There’s a reason we choose them and that’s reason enough for me to claim that. This is the Allegory of Oliver, a short story I wrote to simplify the particular situation which concerns me. Oliver is a dog I met on my walk today, and for the purposes of this story, Oliver has been morphed into a human.

The Allegory of Oliver

**I was informed that a soul patch is a type of facial hair, oh well.*

Oliver’s soul likes particular art. Oliver’s soul patch represents that. Oliver sees another person with a similar soul patch. Oliver’s soul likes it. Oliver becomes friends with them. Oliver does this again and again. Oliver does this online too. Oliver is now surrounded by people with similar looking soul patches! But Oliver notices their own patch is missing something that the rest have. Oliver adjusts. Oliver replaced one part of their patch that didn’t match the rest with one that does. As a result, Oliver now thinks their patch is truer to themselves.

I should explain that a soul patch is my way of representing identity, “style,” and their byproducts (identifying behaviors, interests). Oliver’s initial soul patch was so beautifully unique. Sure, it looked similar to the patches of others, but there was something about Oliver’s patch which was so unapologetically *Oliverean*. Oliver interpreted the similar patches of others to be iterations of their own. Oliver’s individual patch was now amongst a multitude of patches. These patches formed a collective, a *patchette*, which represented the ideal patch of the people. Oliver changed their patch to closer resemble this patchette (an imaginary concept of a style—i.e., what one thinks of when one hears the words punk, coquette, boho, workwear, etc (usually a concept shared among people or an ideal image of said style)). In Oliver’s mind, their patch was lacking something. In reality, everybody else thought the same. They all see the patchette and work towards accurately representing that to the fullest. By the end of this *repatchinization*, not only has Oliver lost all qualities of their patch which was unique, but so did everybody else. They don’t realize this though—they think that by getting closer to the patchette, they’ve successfully gotten closer to themselves.

Yes, fashion is a vehicle for individualization and self-expression. It can also be a vehicle for homogenization and self-repression. The truth is that when we begin to identify ourselves with the things that we wear, we begin to put up the walls of the box we'll soon find ourselves in. For this reason, I *hate*, hate, **hate** the practice of defining one's style.

When fashion begins to serve as evidence that proves that we are who we are and like the things that we do, we've lost sight of its original purpose. Some may say the purpose of fashion is self-expression, others may say it's a form of identification. I think the one true and irrefutable reason we wear clothes is to not be naked. Any reason besides that is personal and certainly true, but only for the individual. The meaning and beauty behind fashion is in the mind of the beholder, not in the eyes of others.

Now heed my warning. Everyday we get closer to the complete devastation brought upon by the doom of *The Repatchening*. Fashion influencers, brand ambassadors, celebrities, fast fashion (especially fast fashion), Wall Street, they're all rooting for us to fall victim. They care not for the arts, but for their wallets. Do you fear falling victim to them and *The Repatchening*? Fear not! There are ways *to not be* damned into the pits of *Repatchitory*. You just have to find ways to make it work.

When finding things to add to your own patch, think to yourself, "What can I add to this to make this more *me*?" DON'T ANSWER THIS. There is no present answer, the answer will come when you see it. Where? This could be anywhere. This is a five-step method that I like to use:

1. Decide you want to make your patch more you.

2. Walk into a clothing store (preferably a thrift/vintage shop) with no goal in terms of particular additions.

3. Whenever you see something that speaks to your soul (something that makes you think "Oh that looks nice!"), take it if your budget permits.

4. There's a chance you'll think "Wait... this doesn't go with my patch. It especially doesn't go with the patchette." Ignore that. The fact that you initially thought it was nice means that it does go with your patch, you'll just have to find ways to make it work.

5. Remember, the patchette is not the goal. You are the goal. Your patch may be similar to one or multiple patchettes, but it doesn't have to be the same as any particular one, and it doesn't have to exclude others. Take parts you like of certain patchettes and interpret them in the image of your own. DON'T remove parts of yours to make room for others. Original pieces are always the most valuable.

I recently took off for a perilous voyage, one that would get me an inch farther from doom. The other week, I decided to be risky and buy a red leather jacket. It's a Wilson's from the 80s, covered in gorgeously set scuffs and sun marks. This was so unlike me. I loved the jacket and the way it looked on me, but I wasn't the kind of guy who wore color. I wore it out to campus once and the outfit I made with it is one of my favorites I've ever put together. Despite that, I hesitated in wearing it for my night out. I could hear the "Wow, you're not wearing all black for once!" from a mile away. That's exactly what I heard several times later that night. I thought that by putting this red leather jacket on my body, I'd be betraying the me that never would. I'm sure almost everyone else has experienced their own version of this at one point or another. Later that night I had a funny idea for a book: an epic of awe-inspiring climaxes and heart-wrenching lows littered with betrayal and self-doubt. I'd call it *The Time I Wore Red and Lived to Tell the Tale.*

What Teachers Are Saying About Gen Z and Gen Alpha Should Worry You:

HOW COVID-19 AND REMOTE LEARNING CHANGED THE CLASSROOM

By: Hermeline Berteloot

"They don't know how to read. I don't want to do this anymore,"

reads the title of a Reddit post published about a year ago under r/Teachers. Since the return to in-person teaching after the COVID-19 pandemic, instructors at all levels have taken social media by storm, voicing not only their frustration but also their worries about students' abilities to perform at their grade level. This isn't all talk—a 2023 Reason article reporting on a new federal study confirms their experiences, noting that "half of public school students are now performing below grade level."

Some instructors blame this continuous decline on the pandemic, while others question if this remains a valid justification five years later.

Janelle Wilkinson, a French teacher at Princeton High School, New Jersey, who has been teaching for almost three decades, explains that the shift in student behavior and ability since COVID "has been exponential." While technology and social media had already begun reshaping the habits of the late 1990s and early 2000s generations, the isolation and excessive screen time during the pandemic accelerated those changes, leaving lasting effects on how Gen Z and Gen Alpha students engage in classrooms today. Dr. Douglas Levandowski, a high school English teacher at the same school, stated that "a lot of students got used to not doing as much" because instructors were told to "scale back" and grade more leniently.

The Academic Fallout

Most of the students in Wilkinson's and Levandowski's classes were in elementary school during the pandemic. They didn't just grow up with mainstream social media—they also spent over a year learning almost entirely on screens. According to both teachers, this combination has left students with incredibly low attention spans, forcing educators to spend far more time and effort trying to get them to engage.

Wilkinson describes drastic changes in her students, stating that they look at her with "glassy looks" on their faces.

She has also seen a stark decrease in the number of students who do their homework, estimating that every day, 50% to 75% of them don't complete their homework. Many show up late, fall asleep in class, or arrive without a pencil or pen. "They don't have the desire," she says. "If it's too hard, instead of pushing through it, they give up."

This year, for the first time in fifteen years, she had to lower expectations on a French monuments quiz. Instead of asking for three facts about each site, she asked for two. Only then did most students complete the assignment successfully. Yet, even with a lighter workload, she still sees a lack of motivation.

She also points to more concerning changes in basic writing. Many of her students "don't know how to write an essay, […] don't use punctuation," and "don't know how to capitalize." Some also use abbreviations such as "idk" on formal quizzes, which Wilkinson believes stems from never being taught the difference between formal and informal writing.

Levandowski sees similar patterns, though at a different level. During reading and writing days, he has had to be more explicit in setting expectations: a writing period should be spent writing, "not writing a little bit of an essay [to then] watch a YouTube video." Similarly, he has had to explain that reading a book for class involves actually reading said book, not listening to the audiobook at two times speed while doing other assignments. He attributes this increased need to clarify expectations to what he calls the "misguided notion of multitasking" that students developed during the pandemic.

Online school made it far too easy for students to disengage when something became boring. Levandowski believes this habit has led students to read less, resulting in their more limited vocabulary. As reading becomes more frustrating, they avoid it altogether, creating a feedback loop that weakens their literacy skills. These patterns affect not only how students engage with texts but also how they write. As Levandowski points out, it is "almost impossible to be a good writer if you're not an avid reader."

Both educators acknowledge that the reasons behind these behaviors are complex. Wilkinson wonders whether these changes are "really [caused by] COVID or … [if it is] just that teachers now have so much to teach?" Levandowski echoes this, explaining that there weren't enough conversations about what students missed during their online years. When schools returned to in-person instruction, most teachers kept teaching their regular curricula without consideration for how students lacked specific skills to stay on track.

Their concerns reflect a national pattern. A 2024 Pew Research Center survey found that "about eight-in-ten teachers say the lasting impact of the pandemic on students' behavior, academic performance and emotional well-being has been very or somewhat negative." Additionally, the same survey found that 48% of public school teachers rated their students' academic performance as fair or poor, and 49% said the same about student behavior.

According to a study done by the Pew Research Center (2024):

8 in 10 teachers

☹ ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹
☹ ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹

say the lasting impact of the pandemic on students' behavior, academic performance and emotional well-being has been **very or somewhat negative,**

48% **of public school teachers**

rated their students' academic performance as fair or poor,

49% **of public school teachers**

said the same about student behavior

"misguided notion of multitasking"

Changes in Students' Behaviors Outside the Classroom

Beyond their behavior in the classroom, Wilkinson has observed a noticeable decline in students' social awareness, particularly in how they interact with one another and with society at large. “It's rare that a student will hold the door for me,” she notes. “They don't say thank you.” Wilkinson believes this decrease in basic courtesies is due to the lack of reinforcement in earlier grades, as students missed part of elementary school due to the pandemic.

This academic year, Wilkinson had many students ask her to write recommendation letters last minute—something that's not part of her job description—and she was struck by how few students followed up. “Not even acknowledgment that I wrote the letter … let alone a thank you,” she says. Where thank-you notes and gifts, or even a simple verbal “thank you,” were once common, such thoughtful demonstrations of gratitude are now the exception. “Students forget that it's not part of our job,” Wilkinson explains. “They just expect that teachers will do it.” She believes it points to a growing sense of entitlement among younger generations.

Wilkinson and Levandowski have also noticed that students are often absorbed by their phones instead of having face-to-face conversations in the hallways. However, while Levandowski views this as “a different way of socializing,” Wilkinson finds that even though it may appear social, “the phone is isolating.” Instead of showing a video to a friend sitting next to them, teens are more likely to send it via message. Levandowski sees this not as inherently better or worse but simply as a different form of social engagement, likening it to how his parents once questioned the rise of phone calls over in-person interaction. His view reflects a broader reality: during the pandemic, technology played a crucial role in helping children stay connected, entertained, and educated at a time when much of their world was off-limits.

As a 2022 article from Maryville University explains: screen time during the pandemic didn't only come with negative consequences—it also showed how technology can support children's growth. It notes that “technology helps children become independent learners more quickly” and allows them to “connect with their family, friends, and others in ways that enrich their relationships.” If Generation Z and Generation Alpha learn how to use it well, their increased use and dependence on technology can be positive. As the article puts it, “rather than trying to eliminate all risk to children when using technology, the goal should be reducing the risk and adapting when problems arise.”

> **"the phone is isolating"**

Where Do We Go From Here?

Wilkinson and Levandowski agree that if schools are to meaningfully address the challenges facing students today, the solution begins with reclaiming their attention. For Levandowski, that means removing phones entirely during the school day. He believes that “getting people off of tech so that they can practice that sustained attention [would be] good."

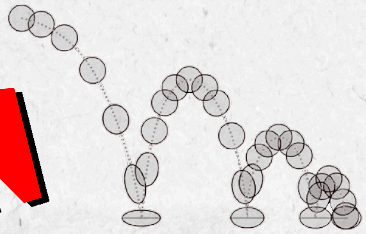
Without the constant pull of notifications, students could relearn how to be fully present in the classroom. Still, he acknowledges that a full ban is unlikely—our reliance on phones for communication, especially in emergencies, makes it nearly impossible. However, he has taken a step towards this by introducing a phone holder in his classroom, requiring students to put their devices away as they enter, helping limit distractions during class time.

Wilkinson shares the concern about students' attention span, though her proposed solution is different. She imagines a year-long or semester elective course centered on mental health and well-being to educate students on the psychological impact of social media, lack of sleep, and poor nutrition. Both approaches point to the same underlying issue. Students are not just distracted; they're disconnected from the world outside their devices.

Levandowski and Wilkinson are not asking for a return to the past, but for a system that helps students remain curious, attentive, and connected while navigating an increasingly tech-driven world.

the ANIMATION industry crisis

by amber safeer



Have you ever wondered why your favorite animated television show never got renewed? Why exciting new animated films get shelved prematurely? Or perhaps why there are just *so many remakes* these days?

The answer lies in the animation industry — more specifically, how it is currently fighting to stay afloat in the tsunami that is corporate greed. But to truly understand where we are now, we have to rewind first to the early 2000s, when Disney acquired Pixar and streaming services were on the rise.

As the mythic beast that is Disney-Pixar released hit after hit, multiple studios emerged, trying to mimic their success for cheaper. These attempts were continuously sold to the growing streaming outlets of the time. Initially, these indie studios had the freedom to create whatever they wanted, and profited by putting it on the streaming platforms, which in turn also found financial growth via subscriptions. The issue arose, however, when these streaming services realized that they could carefully curate their own content and strip away any artistic integrity, favoring algorithmic viewership over quality. This brings us back to the Disney-Pixar situation: investors (like Disney) want a return on their investments (Pixar), and will go through any means necessary to make it happen.

When the pandemic hit in 2020 and film studios across the globe shut down, companies realized that there was one open avenue that could continue to rake in money even in quarantine: animation. Thus, services like Netflix heavily funded animation, creating films that were intended to be released on streaming rather than having a theatrical release.

> While this seemed to be a push in the right direction, it only offered **false hope and promises to the animators.**

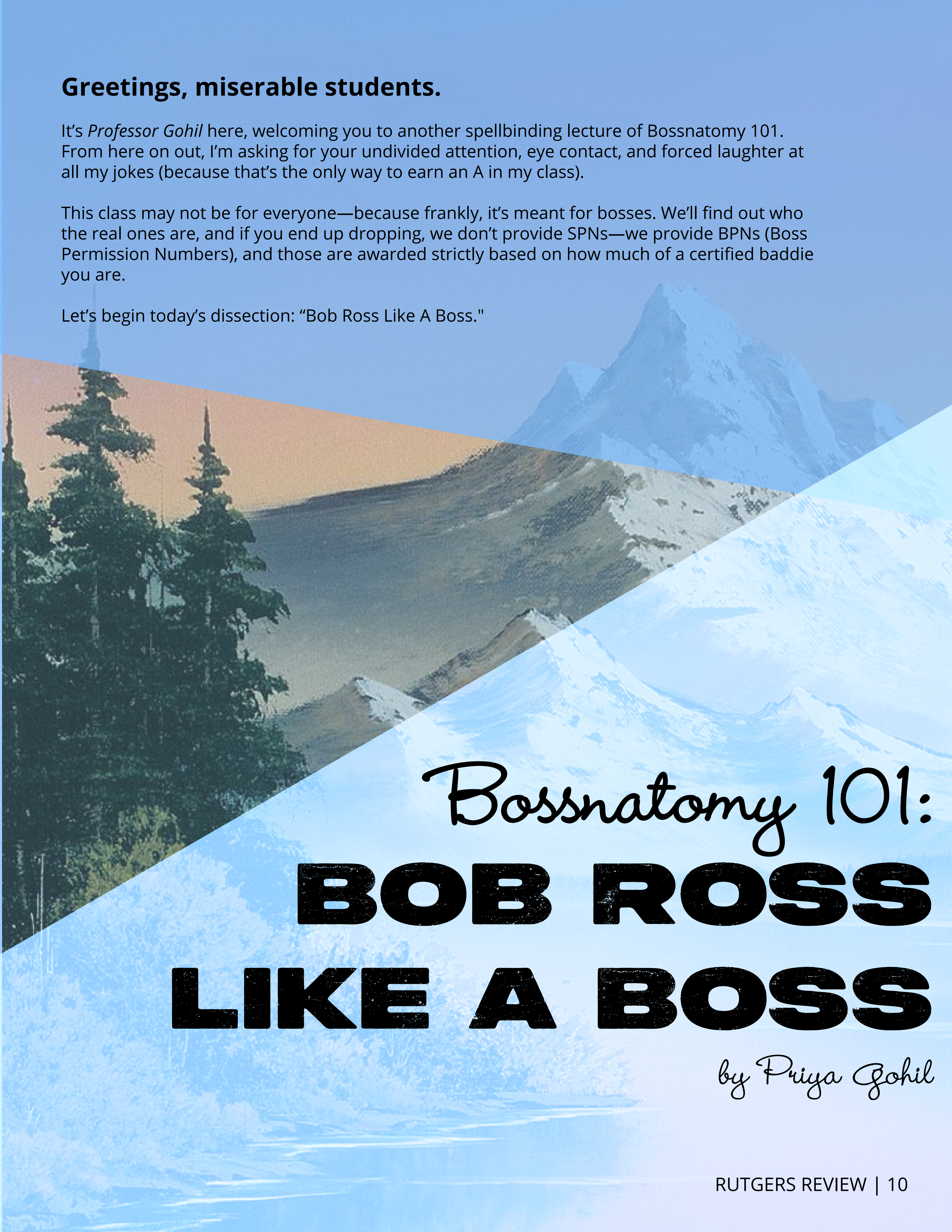
By the time the lock-down ended, animation workers were rewarded with layoffs, outsourcing, canceled projects, budget cuts, and grueling working conditions. Recent acquisitions such as Disney with 21st Century Fox led to entire studios being shut down, like Blue Sky Studios (yes, the people who made *Ice Age*!). Companies are desperately finding the cheapest ways to produce animated films and shows in order to turn a profit. This means that they are trying to create more movies in shorter production periods, replacing skilled workers with artificial intelligence, and denying any novel or unique story ideas, because they are too much of a gamble. For Disney, making live actions, remakes, or sequels ensures that the nostalgia will sell without care for creating art. Even for some films that appear to have given more thought to their craft like *Spiderman: Into the Spiderverse*, its sequel *Across the Spiderverse* had such poor, disorganized working conditions that over 100 employees quit during production.

STAND WITH ANIMATION
STAND WITH ANIMATION
ALGORITHM SUCKS

With mass layoffs and leaves, this puts even more stress on the current employees who have to pick up the jobs of those left behind.

This brings us to the present day. Animation workers are fighting back against the years of mistreatment by greedy corporate entities. The Animation Guild (TAG) is a labor union that advocates for the rights of artists, technicians, writers, and production workers in the animation industry. Since late summer 2024, TAG has been working towards ratifying their Master Agreement and leading their "March on the Boss" protests demanding fair wages, protection from AI, and other requests that would improve the working conditions of those in TAG. In late November 2024, after months of negotiations, they finally reached an agreement with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP). In this agreement, TAG members were able to gain better wages (7% increase), benefits, paid sick leave, protection for remote work, and some protections regarding AI. However, there is still work to be done, as studios have not given most employees the right to deny using AI (only producers were granted that privilege), and outsourcing is still a rampant issue that went unaddressed.

As consumers and viewers to animated films and TV shows, there is not much we can do to directly impact the contracts of these animation workers. However, as loyal supporters, I urge you all to stay up to date on this ongoing battle via the TAG website (animationguild.org) or through Instagram accounts like @animworkersunited. Speak up about your favorite cartoons of the past and present, and spread the word about the fight against generative AI to replace human creativity – **Let's save art and the artists that make it!**



Greetings, miserable students.

It's *Professor Gohil* here, welcoming you to another spellbinding lecture of Bossnatomy 101. From here on out, I'm asking for your undivided attention, eye contact, and forced laughter at all my jokes (because that's the only way to earn an A in my class).

This class may not be for everyone—because frankly, it's meant for bosses. We'll find out who the real ones are, and if you end up dropping, we don't provide SPNs—we provide BPNs (Boss Permission Numbers), and those are awarded strictly based on how much of a certified baddie you are.

Let's begin today's dissection: "Bob Ross Like A Boss."

Bossnatomy 101:

BOB ROSS LIKE A BOSS

by Priya Gohil

On April 3rd, the Ross Bosses stormed College Ave like happy little hurricanes and absolutely wrecked the Yard Commons with godly artistic excellence from approximately 6 to 8 PM. The first guests arrived fashionably early at 5:55 PM, while the host, me, Priya Gohil, was sprinting around dealing with tech issues and mocktail prep. I was moving so fast my pants started to fall down! What a way to greet guests, am I right?

As the clock struck six, participants poured in, grabbed a seat, and made a beeline for the bar to grab a mocktail of choice. We served two themed drinks: Beat the Devil Out of It—–a virgin Shirley Temple named after Bob Ross's *iconic rage therapy catchphrase*—and Alaskan Waterfall —–a chill mix of lemonade, sparkling water, and blue curacao syrup (basically what an arctic vibe tastes like).

For our canvas challenge, I chose Northern Lights (Season 8 Episode 13) because even in the darkest skies (and darkest academic weeks), there's always a little sparkle waiting to break through.

Midterms got your soul in a chokehold? Finals creeping up like a midafternoon fart? Same. That's why this event was all about letting go, embracing the chaos (aka creativity), and finding some light amidst the academic darkness.

And boyyyyyyyy, did y'all deliver!!! From an Elmo engulfed in flames to twin artists painting a frog living its best life, belly up, undeniably chill, I was *shooketh* by the artistry.

Big shoutout to our Painting Assistant Extraordinaire, Madison Miller, who made sure nobody cried over crooked trees. Also, mega thanks to Dr. T and Alyssa for all their help and encouragement.

And what's an event without evidence? Huge thanks to Brittany Baban from WRSU Radio's Visual Media Team for showing up and snapping pics! She helped me clean up after the event and we went out to El Jefe's afterwards (the food slapped).

You want to know what's crazier than a girl (me) wearing sparkly high heel wedges for nine hours straight at this event?

Absolutely nothing. Here's my life advice for you: Wear the ugly sneakers, abandon style, and embrace comfort. But again, I'm a hypocrite. Would I do it again? Yes. Beauty is pain, and pain is gain (the *gain* is futuristic bunions and multiple podiatry visits).

That's a wrap on today's dissection, folks.

Now hold on.

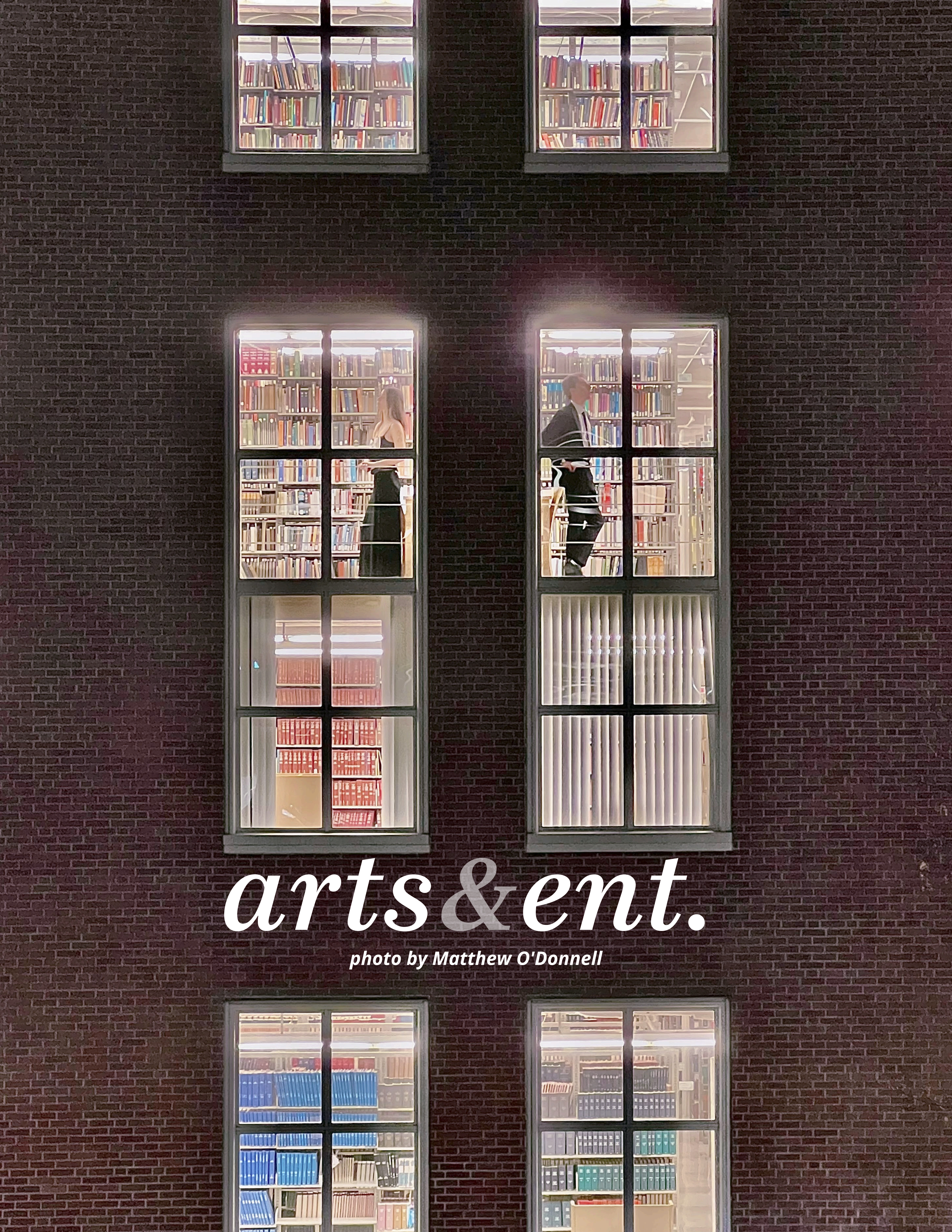
Now wait a minute.

Bella, you need to sit right back down. Kids these days... Packing up like a firenado about to rip through Scott Hall.

The bell(a) doesn't dismiss you, I do. [chewing gum, perks lips, and raises right index finger high in the air].

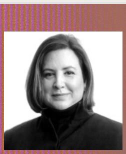
Class dismissed.

Bob Ross Like A Boss
"Northern Lights"
(Season 8 Episode 13)
Freestyle & Fun
Breaking the Rules (Like A Boss)



arts&ent.

photo by Matthew O'Donnell



Elizabeth Easton, Director of the Center for Curatorial Leadership.

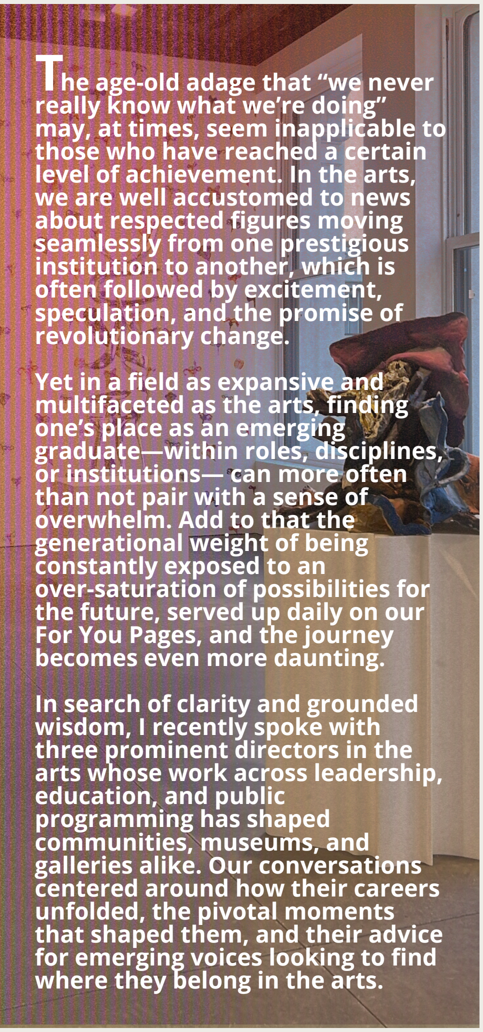
Find the extended article featuring Elizabeth Easton online at therutgersreview.com

THE RUTGERS REVIEW

REECE GOODSON

A World Brimming With Art, but where to start?

I spoke with three directors in the arts about their perspective on the industry and how they found their place within it



The age-old adage that "we never really know what we're doing" may, at times, seem inapplicable to those who have reached a certain level of achievement. In the arts, we are well accustomed to news about respected figures moving seamlessly from one prestigious institution to another, which is often followed by excitement, speculation, and the promise of revolutionary change.

Yet in a field as expansive and multifaceted as the arts, finding one's place as an emerging graduate—within roles, disciplines, or institutions— can more often than not pair with a sense of overwhelm. Add to that the generational weight of being constantly exposed to an over-saturation of possibilities for the future, served up daily on our For You Pages, and the journey becomes even more daunting.

In search of clarity and grounded wisdom, I recently spoke with three prominent directors in the arts whose work across leadership, education, and public programming has shaped communities, museums, and galleries alike. Our conversations centered around how their careers unfolded, the pivotal moments that shaped them, and their advice for emerging voices looking to find where they belong in the arts.

Dmitry Komis

Dmitry Komis has served as the Director of Marian Goodman Gallery's flagship New York location for four years. Born in Ukraine, Komis immigrated to the United States as a young child. He earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Illinois and a Master's of Science in Theory, Criticism, and History of Art, Design, and Architecture from Pratt Institute. Before joining Marian Goodman Gallery, Komis worked as a Director and Curator at galleries and foundations in New York City.

What are your primary responsibilities as the Director of Marian Goodman Gallery?

My primary responsibilities include supporting and promoting artists in all their endeavors, from overseeing exhibitions and liaising about artist's works with curators, collectors, and general visitors alike, to participating in art fairs and facilitating sales internationally. It's a very social role!

Had you always envisioned a career in the arts? If not, what did you initially seek to study?

Absolutely not. I wanted to be a human rights attorney and save the world, or a filmmaker— but after working in the legal field for a number of years, I took a turn and settled for the pursuit of beauty and followed more creative pursuits.

What was your first job in the art world, and how did that experience influence you, personally or professionally?

My first two internships were at Barbara Gladstone and the Guggenheim Museum, back to back, both of which I think of quite fondly. The most important things I learned were about how the art world functions behind the scenes, how much work goes into putting an exhibition together, how much each member of the team contributes, and that ultimately it is interpersonal relationships that make the art world go around.

GROSVENOR BUILDINGS
1875.

In October, Marian Goodman Gallery transitioned it's New York operations from its Midtown home of nearly five decades to a newly renovated, five story building in Tribeca.
Photo: Alex Yudzon.

What do you feel prepared you for your role as Director?

I would credit two qualities of mine, curiosity and empathy, both of which are incredibly important in working with artists, and understanding what they are trying to communicate and why. Ultimately in the arts you have to be open to seeing the world in a different way than you are used to.

What do you find to be the most essential quality of effective leadership in the arts?

Generally, more listening, less speaking. It's important to give everyone a chance to express their point of view.

Some people in the art world have an unfortunate tendency of speaking down to others, whether it's colleagues or the public at large, but I think the arts are inherently democratic and the art world is such a collaborative field, you have to be open to multiple perspectives and be able to uplift marginalized voices and deliver a message that is accessible to others.

What would you recommend to students who are passionate about the arts but struggle to find a clear career path?

The most important thing is to have real world experience in the arts, it can seem intimidating or out of reach when you are starting out, but it's important to see multiple points of view, take various jobs, whether as a critic/curator or a gallery/museum professional, it's important to try various roles to see where you might have a natural instinct and engage with the arts on a deeper level. Your first job will not be your last, and if you are seeking a long-term career each experience can be a source of meaning and insight.

Maura Reilly

Maura Reilly has been the Director of Rutgers University's Zimmerli Art Museum for nearly three years. Born and raised in Hingham, Massachusetts, Reilly received her undergraduate degree from Providence College in Rhode Island and her Ph.D. from New York University's Institute of Fine Arts.

Throughout her career, Reilly has held several leadership positions in the arts. She is the Founding Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, where she developed and launched the first exhibition and public programming space in the United States devoted entirely to feminist art. Reilly has also authored and edited numerous books and articles on contemporary art.

What are your primary responsibilities as director of the Zimmerli Art Museum?

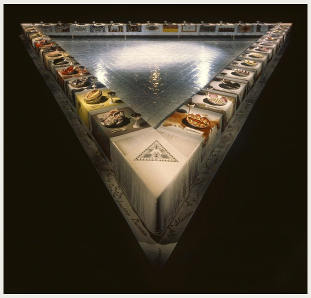
There are myriad responsibilities for a museum director, most of which involve the overall management of the institution and implementation of its vision and the mission. It's running the day-to-day operations; I also manage a staff of close to 40 full-time employees. Of course handling the annual budget is something that I'm obsessed with! But I'm also currently working on a strategic plan, and making sure that that's jiving with what we're trying to do as an institution, and then setting up a path moving forward—it's a five-year plan, and that's a big part of what I've been working on the last six months.

There are the major departments—curatorial, education, registrars, operations, finance, marketing—that's my senior staff, and making sure that things are operating smoothly for them. So it's all part of a larger management structure. But primarily, recently, I've been very involved in the curatorial program because, with Donna Gustafson [the museum's prior chief curator] stepping down and retiring, I had to step up and take over.

What are we doing for exhibitions? Directors are often involved in the decision-making there. I brought in *Indigenous Identities* [the museum's most recent show] and other exhibitions that were my ideas.

What you try to do is to have a vision for the institution but not make it authoritarian. So it's about trying to find a vision that you feel everybody across the institution can get behind.

Also, making sure that underrepresented artists are displayed alongside the typical canonical artists is crucial—and, believe it or not, in this political climate, that's actually a radical vision, which is sad.



During her role at the Brooklyn Museum's Sackler Center in 2007, Reilly played an instrumental role in the permanent installation of Judy Chicago's 1979 work, *The Dinner Party.* Photo © Donald Woodman

What was your first job in the art world, and how did that experience influence you, personally or professionally?

My first job in the arts was at a gallery in Boston after grad school. I disliked it so much that it made me realize what I didn't want to do. Then, my second job was at the RISD Art Museum, working as an intern; I realized that I really loved museums. I didn't like the commercial aspect of galleries, my museum experience was very different.

What do you find to be the most essential quality of effective leadership in the arts?

Empathy, not being too righteous in your vision —trying to be an empathetic leader. I think that really caring deeply about those that work for you is probably the best leadership that I've experienced, and therefore, I try to be the same type of leader.

What would you recommend to students who are passionate about the arts but struggle to find a clear career path?

To talk to people—talk to as many people as they can in the art world. If they love art, go to lectures and experience what an educational person does. Go to shows and listen to a curator talk; go to an art panel somewhere. Do on-the-ground research to determine that this is something that you want to pursue and what avenue you'd like to pursue in relation to it.

One of the things that I always tell folks, too, is that if you love the arts it doesn't mean you have to be in the arts. It also could mean that you become a corporate lawyer who's a collector or a corporate lawyer who paints on the weekends. I think if I were to redo my career, I wouldn't be in it. I would have become a collector and probably should have become a lawyer.

Not that I regret it, but I didn't have to pursue it to love it. You could, for example, buy a house and be excited about decorating it with fabulous art—supporting artists that way. Or be on a board of a nonprofit that supports the arts. All of that is equally important.

You are the writer of multiple books surrounding ethics in the art world. On the cusp of the release of *Museums and Social Justice: Towards Reckoning and Change*, what can we expect from this book that differs in content from your previous books?

My last book [*Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating*] looked closely at and celebrated my fellow curators who are doing what I view as really important ethical activist work—curators that are really working to ensure that the marginalized are given a platform. I talk in that book about at least 30 curators today who are doing phenomenal work in that regard.

I broke the chapters up into feminist, queer, and artists of color—people that are working really, really hard in those areas. I was looking closely at those who have dedicated their careers to ensuring that all artists have a platform.

Museums and Social Justice is different because I'm looking at ethical issues that museums are currently facing, one of which is the lack of inclusion of underrepresented artists. One chapter is called "Whose Museum Is It?" and it surrounds exclusions and inclusions in museums. Then there's a chapter on the importance of decolonization, the importance of indigenizing a museum. There's a chapter looking at "queering" the museum—what would that look like if one were to "queer" a museum?

It offers some advice and a lot of case studies. It's very critical of a lot of museums for the way that they've handled repatriation; The British Museum is particularly egregious, The Met is really horrible in the way that they handle repatriation and looting. It looks at a lot of institutions and either commends them or criticizes them.

Being the writer of two books surrounding ethics in the arts, what drives you to write and have you always had a desire to profess your thoughts? Do you feel it's an obligation of people who have deep thoughts to express them?

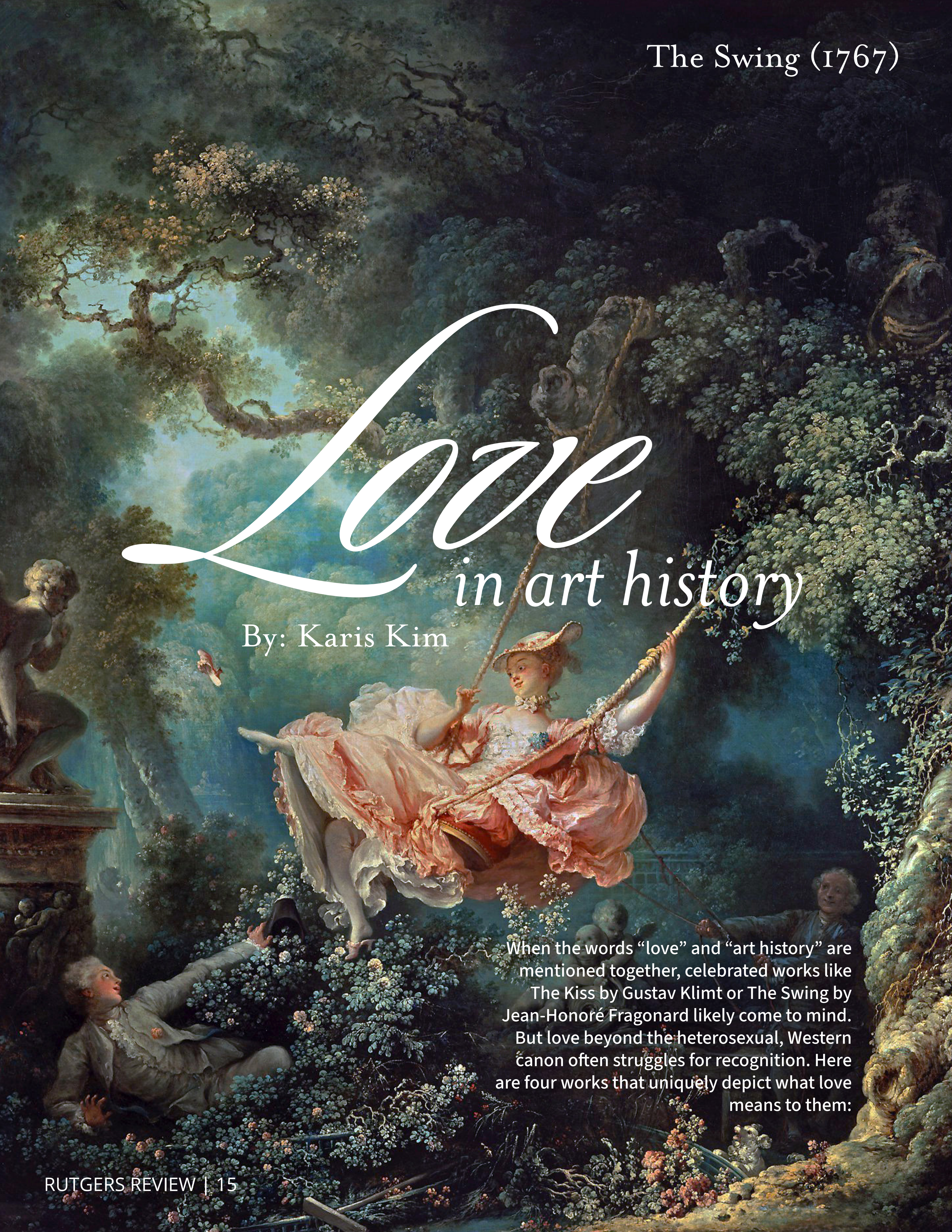
It's definitely an obligation. First of all, I went to grad school to get my PhD because I have a lot to say; going the academic route is really wonderful because you have a lot of opportunity to write, to work with students, and to produce a lot of scholarship. When you're a museum director, you don't have time, so I write on Saturdays and Sundays. It's a labor of love because I work 60 hours a week, and then I work on the weekends. When I'm writing, I'm at my happiest; people are like, "How do you do that?" I'm like, "because I love it."

The other main reason is that I don't have kids, so I view my scholarship as my legacy. So, 100 years from now, I won't have great-great-grandkids on this planet, but I'll have several books. My contribution to the world is my scholarship—that's really, really important to me. I don't have to write books; I have a job.

I couldn't work Saturdays and Sundays writing a book on Impressionism because I don't really care about Impressionism—it's a beautiful movement, but I'm not going to dedicate my time to it—but if it's something that I really believe in, then it ends up being enjoyable in a weird kind of way, even though I'm working 12-hour days on Saturdays and Sundays. It helps to have a very supportive partner... absolutely, otherwise, I couldn't do it.

Love in art history

By: Karis Kim

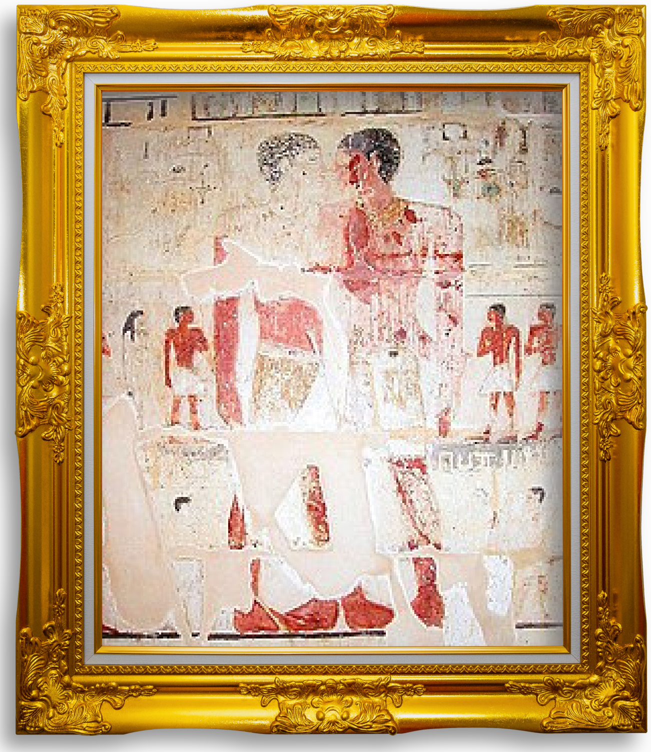


The Swing (1767)

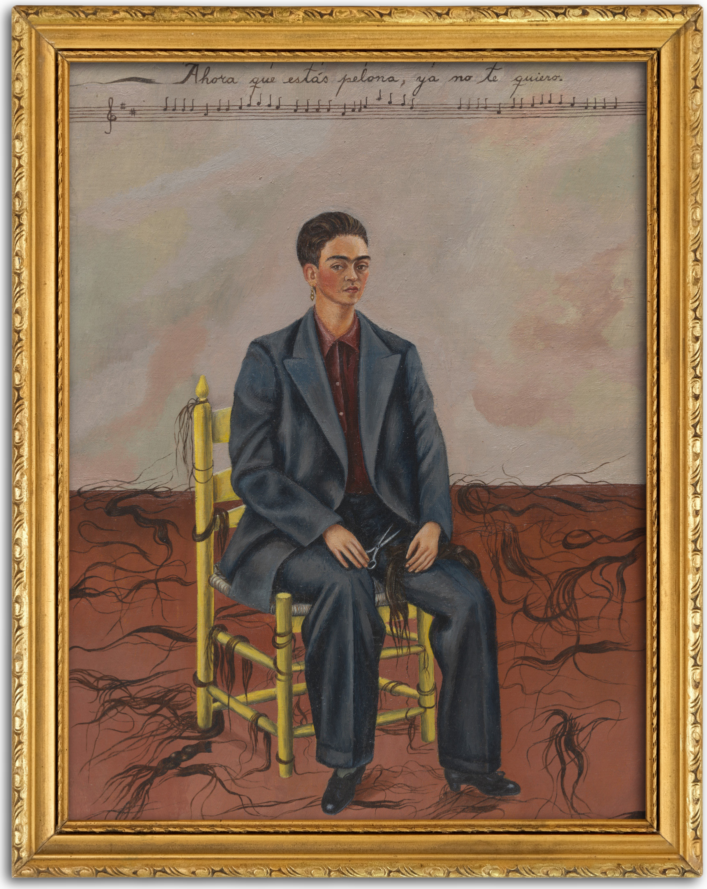
When the words “love” and “art history” are mentioned together, celebrated works like The Kiss by Gustav Klimt or The Swing by Jean-Honoré Fragonard likely come to mind. But love beyond the heterosexual, Western canon often struggles for recognition. Here are four works that uniquely depict what love means to them:

“ROYAL CONFIDANTS”

Khnumhotep and Niakhkhnum were buried together at Saqqara, their tomb eventually discovered by Egyptologists in 1964. These two male ancient Egyptian royal servants were described in hieroglyphics as “royal confidants”, sharing the title of Overseer of the Manicurists and among the privileged few permitted to touch the pharaoh. The tomb depicts the two men in a manner that was usually reserved for husband and wife: their pose—embracing, so close their noses touch—is the most intimate pose allowed in ancient Egyptian artistic conventions. Because of their unusual depiction, they are often interpreted as the first recorded same-sex couple. However, this is difficult to definitively say because although homosexuality wasn’t uncommon in Ancient Egypt, no further evidence of their relationship exists beyond their tomb; furthermore, the presence of their wives and children in certain panels led others to suggest that they were siblings. Nonetheless, there are multiple depictions of the two men embracing and, in certain scenes, Khnumhotep occupies the position usually designated for the wife. Regardless of the true nature of their relationship, two men of equal social standing being buried together (despite both certainly having wives) was extremely unique. What is undeniable, however, platonically or romantically, are the words the men chose to inscribe over the entrance: “JOINED IN LIFE AND JOINED IN DEATH.”



Mastaba of Khnumhotep and Niankhkhnum
(Fifth Dynasty, 25th century BCE)


Ahora que estás pelona, ya no te quiero.

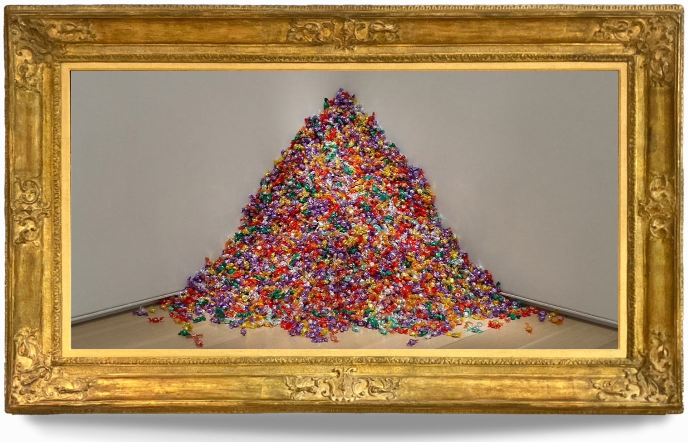
Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair (1940)
Frida Kahlo

175 POUNDS

In the corner lies an ideal weight of 175 pounds of multicolored candy. While the work's physical form and scale change with each display the label lists its ideal weight that reflects the average body weight of an adult male; more specifically, it reflects the subject referred to in the title, Ross Laycock, Torres' husband who died due to complications from AIDS in 1991. The weight fluctuates based on a variety of factors, such as the weight the gallery decides to initially install, the extent of audience interactions (visitors are encouraged to take a piece of candy from the exhibition), and whether the museum decides to replenish the candy or not. The work has been interpreted as an "allegorical portrait" of Laycock as his health deteriorated.

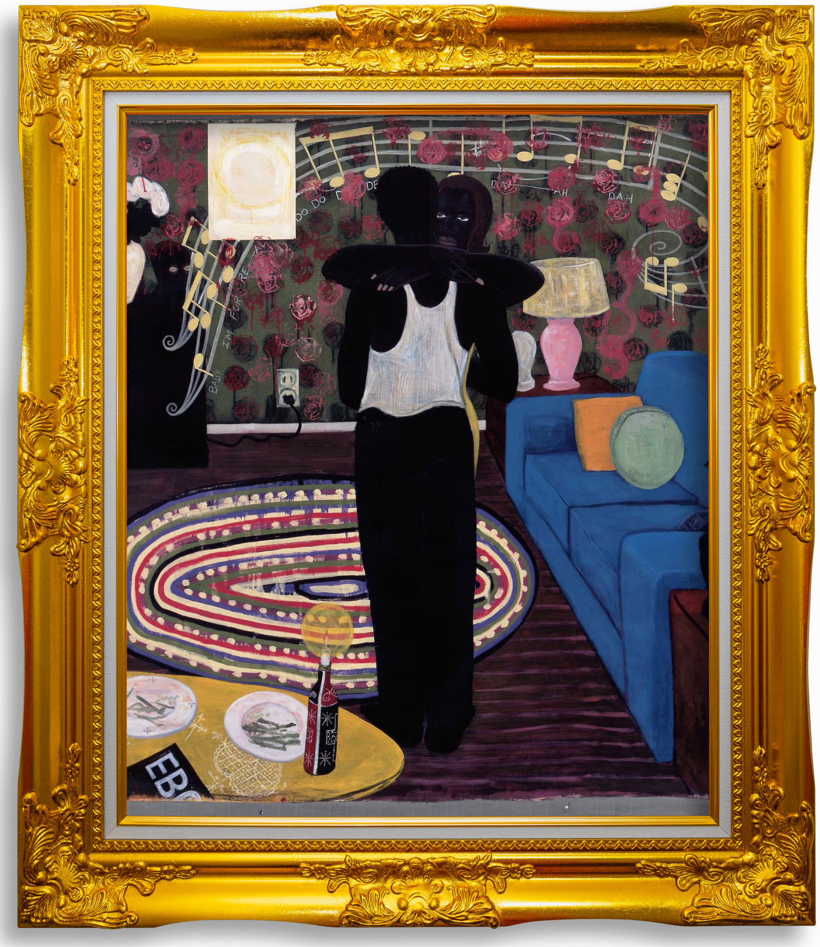
"I DON'T LOVE YOU ANYMORE"

Frida Khalo is one of the most well known Mexican artists in history, best known for her vibrant self-portraits. In fact, sixty works (more than a third of the easel paintings known by Khalo) are self-portraits. Almost a month after her divorce from Diego Rivera, Khalo composed a piece devoid of her typical feminine dresses; instead, she dons a large black suit and has cut off the long hair that Rivera adored, holding scissors in her right hand and a clump of her shorn hair in her left. The only feminine remnants of her old self are her earrings and high-heels. At the top of the portrait, lyrics of a song read "See, if I loved you, it was for your hair, now you're bald, I don't love you anymore." Some art historians interpret this as an outlet for Kahlo to mourn her ex-husband, who had been unfaithful but whom she would remarry by the end of 1940. But for others, this piece is a defiant demonstration of her self-reliance and independence, declaring that even if she suffered from romantic love, she would at least retain her self-love.



Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.) (1991)
Félix González-Torres

BLACK LOVE



Slow Dance (1992)
Kerry James Marshall

Marshall created this piece through acrylic and collage on canvas, utilizing vibrant colors and deviating from classical perspective. A dancing couple is positioned in the middle of the canvas as various colors, patterns, light, and music surround them; the couch, stereo, and flowers are elements that indicate a middle-class status. Their Black African culture is also acknowledged through objects like a mask, the vase, and the carpet. Marshall uses the various media—painting, sculptural installation, collage, film, and photography—to explore the history of black identity and marginalization in the US and Western art as a whole. Beyond Slow Dance, Marshall utilizes black folk art traditions in visually powerful compositions, focusing on black subjects that have been largely excluded from the artistic canon.

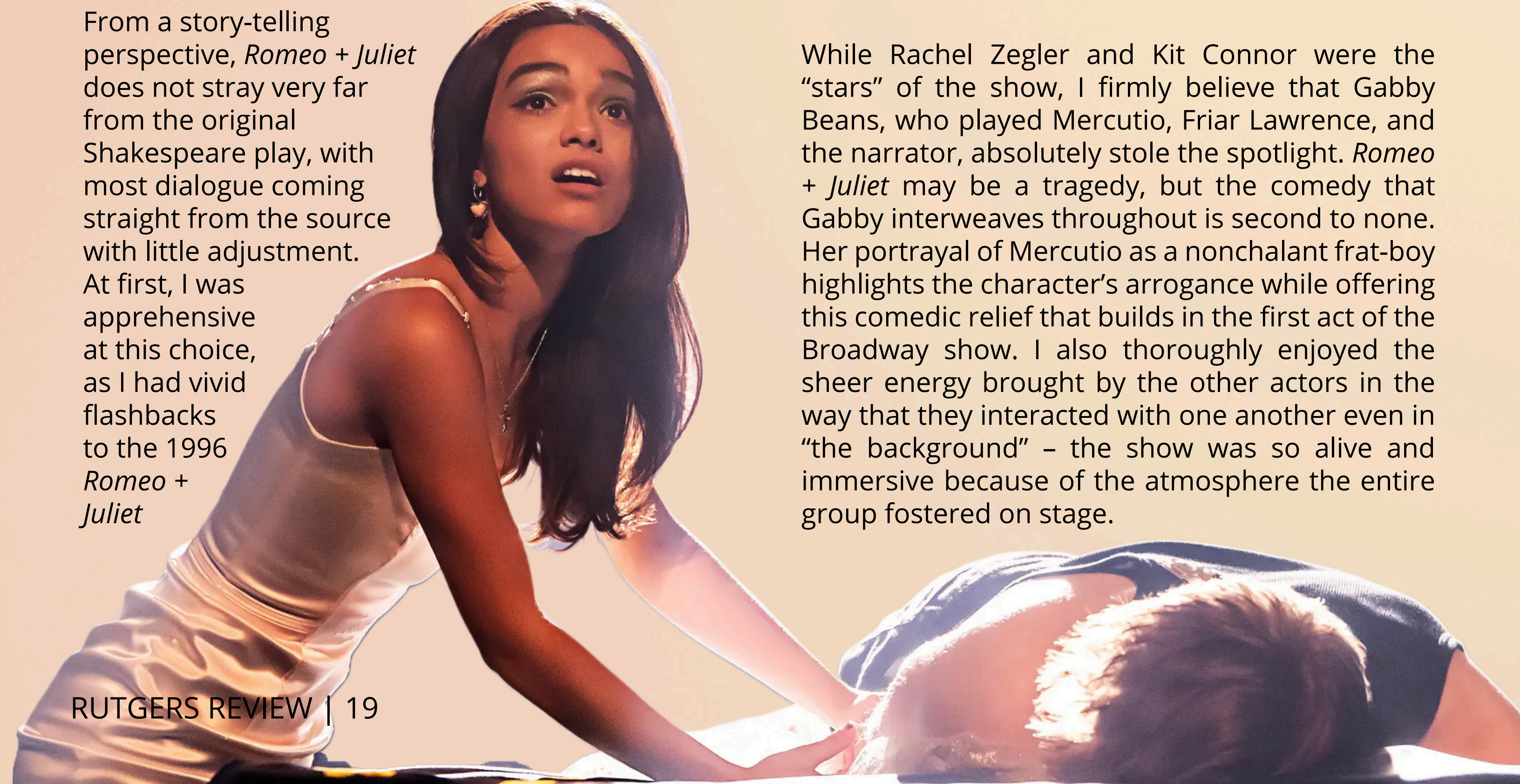
THE REINVENTION OF ROMEO + JULIET

BY AMBER SAFEER

In February 2025, I had the pleasure of seeing *Romeo + Juliet* on Broadway live before its short existence came to a close. Even with a limited run of only 20 weeks, *Romeo + Juliet* made its presence quite known, namely because the stunt casting of Rachel Zegler and Kit Connor did most of the heavy lifting when it came to the show's marketing. This, coupled with songs produced by Grammy award-winner Jack Antonoff (known well for his work with Taylor Swift and Lana Del Ray), nearly guaranteed the success of the revival of this Shakespearean tragedy.

With so much buzz surrounding the show, I was both excited and skeptical if it would live up to the hype. As someone who is an avid lover of Broadway and also a fan of the actors playing the titular characters, I do believe the show was extremely entertaining, though it is not without its flaws.

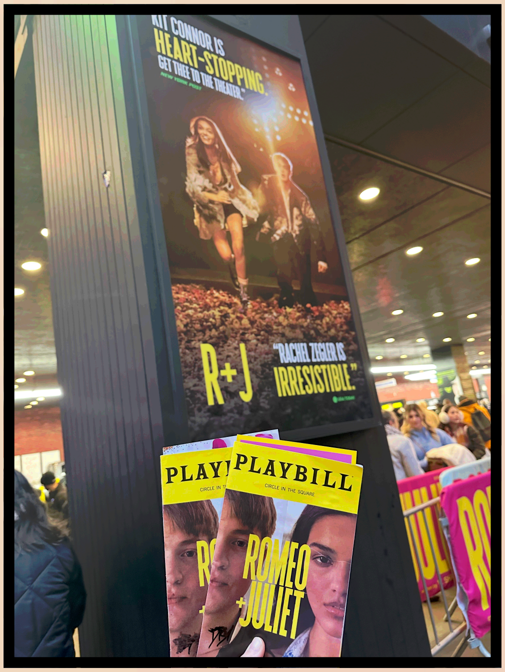
From a story-telling perspective, *Romeo + Juliet* does not stray very far from the original Shakespeare play, with most dialogue coming straight from the source with little adjustment. At first, I was apprehensive at this choice, as I had vivid flashbacks to the 1996 *Romeo + Juliet* featuring Leonardo DiCaprio. To modernize a play but still use old language seemed like an impossible task.



However, I quickly realized that *Romeo + Juliet* Broadway is not a complete modernization, rather it is a revival of the Shakespearean play mixed with a slightly more contemporary setting. Aspects such as the outfits were reflective of a 21st century period, as was the inflection in the character's dialogue. This, I believe, was one of the strongest parts about the show. Despite not truly understanding the language of Shakespeare when I read the original *Romeo and Juliet* way back in freshman year of high school, I felt that emotion portrayed and the delivery of the lines suddenly made everything click, as you could imagine the true sentiments of the dialogue as if it were in modern times. Each actor had bold intentions in the way they spoke, carried themselves, and interacted with others.

While Rachel Zegler and Kit Connor were the "stars" of the show, I firmly believe that Gabby Beans, who played Mercutio, Friar Lawrence, and the narrator, absolutely stole the spotlight. *Romeo + Juliet* may be a tragedy, but the comedy that Gabby interweaves throughout is second to none. Her portrayal of Mercutio as a nonchalant frat-boy highlights the character's arrogance while offering this comedic relief that builds in the first act of the Broadway show. I also thoroughly enjoyed the sheer energy brought by the other actors in the way that they interacted with one another even in "the background" – the show was so alive and immersive because of the atmosphere the entire group fostered on stage.

Another choice that made this show feel more contemporary was the usage of the ENTIRE theater, not just the main stage. Circle in the Square Theater is a very tiny, intimate venue featuring a thrust stage, allowing the audience to be seated on three sides of the stage. This setting was used to its advantage, as the actors frequently ran up and down the rows of the theater, climbed into the fly loft above the stage, and on occasion spoke to the audience members themselves. Despite the stage dressing being somewhat minimalistic, this interactive approach was a great substitute to traditional theater sets.


KIT CONNOR IS HEART-STOPPING. GET THEE TO THE THEATER.
R+J
"RACHEL ZEGLER IS IRRESISTIBLE."
PLAYBILL
PLAYBILL
CIRCLE IN THE SQUARE
ROMEO + JULIET

Outside of Circle in the Square Theater

Now, I cannot review *Romeo + Juliet* without talking about Kit Connor and Rachel Zegler. I think that as performers, they were absolutely incredible, and the chemistry between them was palpable. Kit Connor was especially enchanting given that this show was his Broadway debut, and the way that he brought Romeo to life felt so believable and unlike his previous on-screen roles. What I did not enjoy, however, actually has nothing to do with Kit and Rachel themselves. Rather, it was the marketing surrounding them. All on social media and around the theater, quotes are displayed claiming the show to be "sexy af," "white hot," or "unabashedly horny." I despise this advertising for a number of reasons. For starters, it should go without a reminder that this play is about the immature, detrimental decisions made by a naive 13 and 16 year old couple. While the expression of sexuality has its moments in the show, I feel that simplifying the show to being "white hot" is gross, misleading, and overlooks the talent of the cast and the story as a whole. It feels more like an objectification of Rachel and Kit as young, beautiful stars, rather than praise for their performances.

To that point, it is crucial to discuss the songs in the show, namely Rachel's "Man of the House." While not dubbed a musical, *Romeo + Juliet* featured a few songs scattered throughout the show (including a "We Are Young" singalong led by Gian Perez, who played Paris, Peter, and Samson). However, "Man of the House" is the only song of the play to have a Spotify release, and for good reason. When hearing the song performed live, I experienced genuine chills. Rachel's voice was nothing like I expected based on her past discography, and her raw emotion was so refreshing to hear in a show like this. That being said, I do think the choice to incorporate original songs in the first place was unnecessary, as the play would have achieved the same effect regardless of the music. However, I also understand that it would be a shame to cast a powerhouse like Rachel Zegler and not have her sing. Because the songs were few and far between, they somewhat take you out of the moment in the show; therefore, I feel that it would have benefited Romeo + Juliet to either eliminate the songs entirely or go full force into being a musical rendition of the Shakespeare play.

Despite my initial hesitance toward this show, I would say that I was pleasantly surprised. Romeo + Juliet Broadway may not be as well regarded as a show like Wicked (its theater neighbor!), but for a limited run and numerous Broadway debut actors, I believe that it was well worth seeing in its lifespan. If nothing else, it was an entertaining revival of a well-known story with a stacked cast and crew filled with personality and devotion to their craft.

HOW AMC'S INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE GOT ME INTO VAMPIRES (AND WHY IT'LL GET YOU INTO THEM, TOO)

WRITTEN BY NIKHITA KUMAR

Honestly, I was never super into vampires.

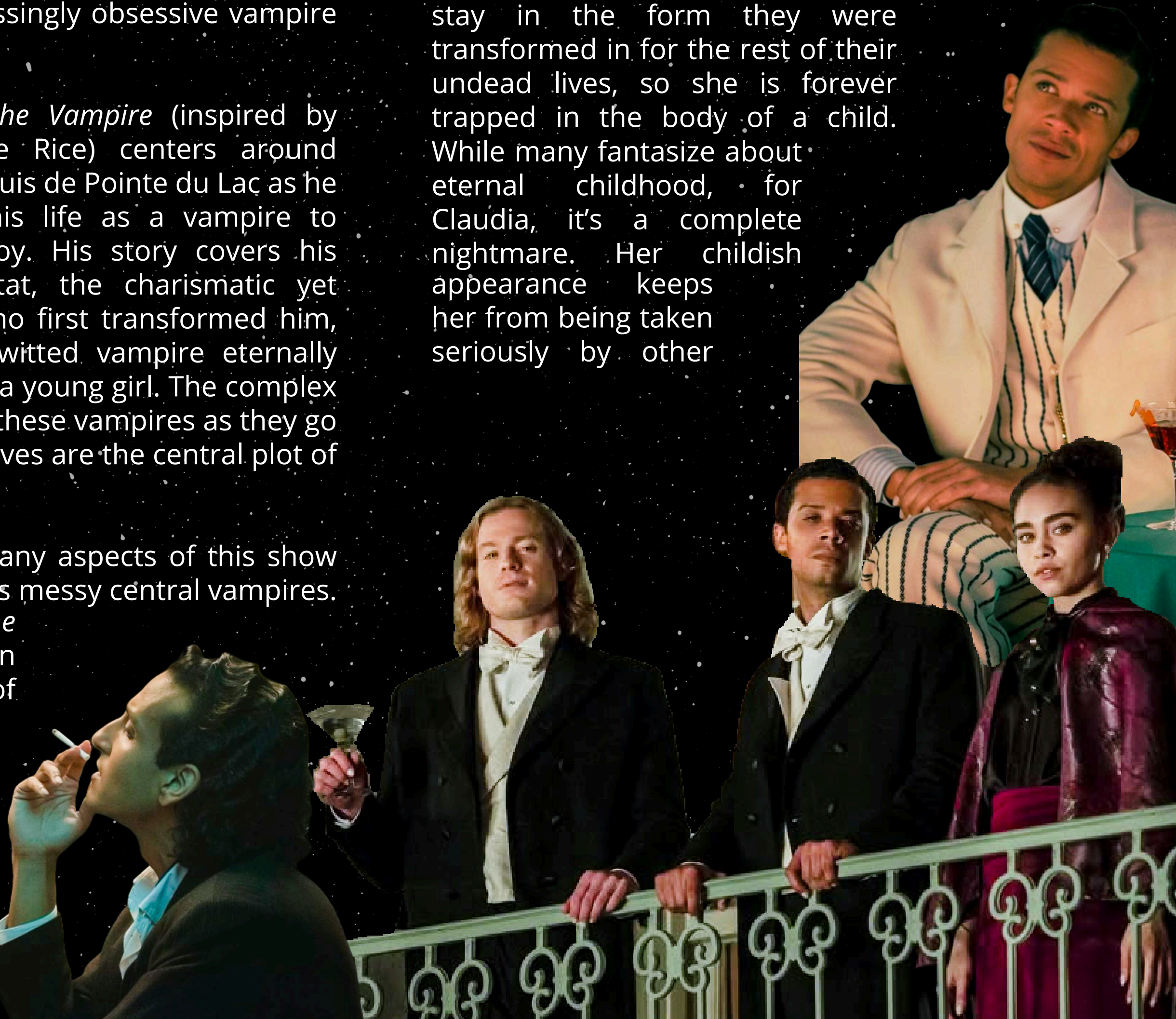
The fangs and capes just never really did it for me. Even in modern teenage shows, where these Dracula-esque caped villains were transformed into muscled heartthrobs, I still didn't feel a strong pull towards these mythical monsters. As my peers got invested in series like Twilight and The Vampire Diaries, I felt a little left out. I would never classify myself as a "hater"—I just personally didn't see the appeal of these media.

Then the AMC show *Interview with the Vampire* waltzed into my life, and I experienced my first true, embarrassingly obsessive vampire phase.

Interview with the Vampire (inspired by book series by Anne Rice) centers around century-old vampire Louis de Pointe du Lac as he retells the story of his life as a vampire to journalist Daniel Malloy. His story covers his relationship with Lestat, the charismatic yet dangerous vampire who first transformed him, and Claudia, a quick-witted vampire eternally trapped in the body of a young girl. The complex relationships between these vampires as they go through their undead lives are the central plot of this show.

There are so many aspects of this show that made me fall for its messy central vampires. *Interview with the Vampire* has such an interesting portrayal of love between vampires: showing, without hesitation or glorification, the intensity and toxicity of such relationships. The fact is, when someone is an undead creature that survives off of feeding off of the life of others, there's no possibility of a completely healthy, positive relationship. Vampires live a naturally toxic existence, and it's only logical that this toxicity bleeds into their relationships. I love that the show completely embraces this darkness.

I also thoroughly enjoy the characterization of the three main characters, and their gray morality. I especially love Claudia's story. Claudia was transformed into a vampire at the young age of fourteen. Vampires stay in the form they were transformed in for the rest of their undead lives, so she is forever trapped in the body of a child. While many fantasize about eternal childhood, for Claudia, it's a complete nightmare. Her childish appearance keeps her from being taken seriously by other



vampires, and from finding love. She (very understandably) has a breakdown over this eternal misery she's trapped within, and I couldn't help but find myself fascinated. Not enough media explores the concept of vampirism and eternal youth in a way that fully embraces the horror of this kind of story. *Interview with the Vampire* pulls no punches when portraying Claudia's eternal dilemma, and I truly love that.

Louis, as the main character, is also constructed in a really fascinating way. He's a closeted black man in New Orleans in the 1900s, and faces a constant uphill battle as he moves through society. Although Louis often serves as the moral core for other characters, he is no angel—he works as a pimp, benefiting from the exploitation of sex workers. I enjoyed viewing that complexity in his character, which only continues to develop as his relationships with both Claudia and Lestat deepen and evolve. There is some mystery surrounding this character as he narrates, as details often conflate and contradict with one another. The question of how much we can rely on Louis's story is faced by viewers as we watch this tale.

Lestat is possibly the most intriguing character on the show. Arrogant and temperamental, yet frighteningly insecure, Lestat is a vampire of contradictions. In Louis's perspective, he is both monster and lover, and this contrast between the two aspects of his personality makes his dynamic with the other characters all the more riveting. Even as he frightens the audience with his actions, his natural charisma on screen makes him a character difficult to fully despise.

I think what I love most about Louis, Lestat, and Claudia is that despite their monstrous nature, they are unflinchingly human in their needs and desires. Even while living a never-ending existence, possessing eternal youth, and flaunting powers beyond the imagination, at the end of the day, they crave love and connection above all else. It's this vulnerable need for love that drives them, even as this need becomes twisted and selfish over time. Even that selfishness is human. I love this portrayal of vampires as not just untouchable, superior beings, but creatures who suffer from the same emotional hang ups as us mortals do.

The show is also just so well-made. Every episode of *Interview with the Vampire* is well-crafted, rife with themes and deep symbolism that make watching the show that much more interesting. I honestly hadn't realized how interesting vampires could be prior to this show. If the show was only half as well-written, I wouldn't nearly be as interested in vampires as I am now.

All in all, *Interview with the Vampire* is a stunning exploration of truly messed-up vampires and their complex inner lives, and I can't help but be obsessed with it. If you, dear reader, are convinced by my ramblings to watch this amazing show, I know you'll fall in love with it too.

ALIEN: ROMULUS

a review by Aidan Icasiano

I love the *Alien* franchise. It has the distinct style of cassette futurism in its gritty, industrial setting, while also showcasing H.R. Giger's bold and grotesque body horror designs. The xenomorphs are otherworldly (alien, some might even say) and their unnerving forms always fill the screen with Lovecraftian dread.

Since the release of *Alien* in 1979, the franchise has constantly tried to recreate that initial success that earned its cult following. Despite the sequels and the prequels and the prequel sequels, no other *Alien* movie could compare to the original. One would think that, in a universe plagued with deadly xenomorphs, dubious and god-like Engineers, and murderous corporate robots, the supply of creative stories would be endless. After all, in space, no one can hear you scream ... Yet *Alien Romulus* plays it so safe in comparison to its predecessors, and it works.

In the past, the *Alien* franchise has gone where no other series has before. Before I dive deep into *Romulus*, I want to highlight its eight predecessors and what made each one special, offering a little insight on how each one carves its place in the genre.

- ***Alien***: The classic cat and mouse horror film, featuring a crew of space truckers trapped in a narrow spaceship with a hungry xenomorph. Sigourney Weaver stars as Ellen Ripley, the powerhouse final girl.
- ***Aliens***: Now, the xenomorphs are the ones being hunted. James Cameron, following his success from The Terminator, throws horror completely out the window and inserts a Vietnam-esque action commando narrative.
- ***Aliens 3***: The divisive end to the initial trilogy. Just when you think Ripley has caught a break, she is thrust into the arms of violent prisoners with xenomorphs on the loose.
- ***Alien Resurrection***: The campy, dark humor reboot to the series. This movie and Jason X are too alike, but it's rather one-note for the series.
- ***Alien Versus Predator***: The first introduction to a very cool crossover. Two sci-fi stars duke it out for the audience while also shedding light on more lore about the species' unique relationship.
- ***Alien Versus Predator Requiem***: Take the original blood feud and introduce a new monster: the Predalien. Despite an interesting concept, the movie is so dark that it's hard to make out anything good from it.
- ***Alien Prometheus***: Ridley Scott returns to his original franchise and attempts to expound upon the lore through prequels. While worth watching, it's uncertain if this storyline has opened Pandora's box for better or worse.
- ***Alien Covenant***: The prequel sequel continues to follow the strange origins of the xenomorphs and the fate of the mysterious Engineers. Michael Fassbender sells the intelligent android act, in which he plays two characters at the same time.

With my bases covered, I hope you can better understand the position I'm coming from. The *Alien* franchise has come so far and made considerable changes (and retcons) to its narrative to match its changing audiences. As a result, I think one of the series' strengths is the diverse array of genres it has seeped into. Yet, after staying with a series for so long, anyone can see how quickly and easily things can go off the rails. Ripley's half xeno-baby? Horrifying. Killing off Newt and Hicks? Insane. The Engineers? Their introduction honestly created more questions than answers.

So, as a fan, it was so nice to see the *Alien* franchise go back to its roots; it wasn't trying to reinvent the wheel, nor did it introduce a revolutionary narrative. Instead, Fede Álvarez (Don't Breathe and Evil Dead) paid homage to the original film in ways that echoed the series' core foundations.

Firstly, the setting, both narratively and stylistically, echoes the original designs of the bleak and chunky technology, the drab industrial gray colors, the dangers of corporate regimes, and the naive yet uneasy relationship between the cast of characters. As the story behind the derelict station unfolds, the dreadful feeling of uncertainty only becomes stronger. Whether you've seen an *Alien* movie or not, the pacing of the movie builds palpable tension well before the first xenomorph's introduction.

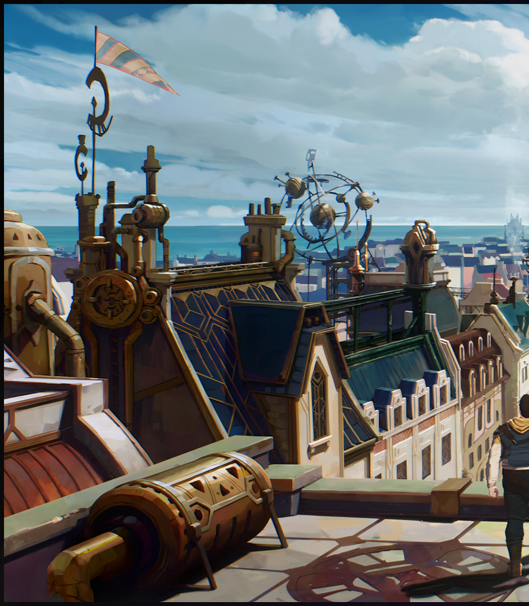
The cast was composed of lesser-known actors, allowing audiences to fully immerse themselves in Romulus without distractions from star-studded casts. The group truly sold the feeling of naive teens trapped in a situation much worse than they expected. Rain Carradine, played by Cailee Spaeny, certainly deserves to be recognized as the most competent character of the series, and a worthy successor to Ripley's badassery. Another actor worth mentioning is David Jonsson, who plays Rain's android brother and provides the most convincing inhuman performance, providing two sides to the character as the story progresses.

As the resident *Alien* nerd, I want to point out aspects that truly sold me on the movie, especially in its recognition and respect for the previous installments. For example, as Andy defends Rain from a xenomorph, he hits it with (a pulse rifle and) the line, "Get away from her, you bitch" a la Ripley in *Aliens*, albeit with his slightly malfunctional, robotic stutter. The black goo reconnects the storyline back to Ridley's prequels, while the Offspring introduces the horrific product of the chemical, akin to *Alien Resurrection*. These call-backs were certainly gotcha moments, but I appreciated the fan service nonetheless. On the effects side, I was astounded by the level of VFX and practical elements utilized throughout the movie, such as the animatronic puppets used to bring the facehuggers to life. Moreover, I enjoyed seeing Giger's designs take shape in more world building, especially in the grotesque xenomorph cocoon and the Offspring's appearance. Lastly, I'd love to mention the scene wherein Rain and Tyler arm themselves before facing the xenomorph, which harkens back to Hicks showing Ripley the colonial marine way in *Aliens* too; the F44AA pulse rifle is such a smart piece of equipment for a dangerous research station and the sound and design of it is impeccable.

While *Alien Romulus* did not set new records for the franchise, its simplicity is its strength. Even for newcomers, Romulus is worth a watch for anyone interested.

architecture in ARCANE

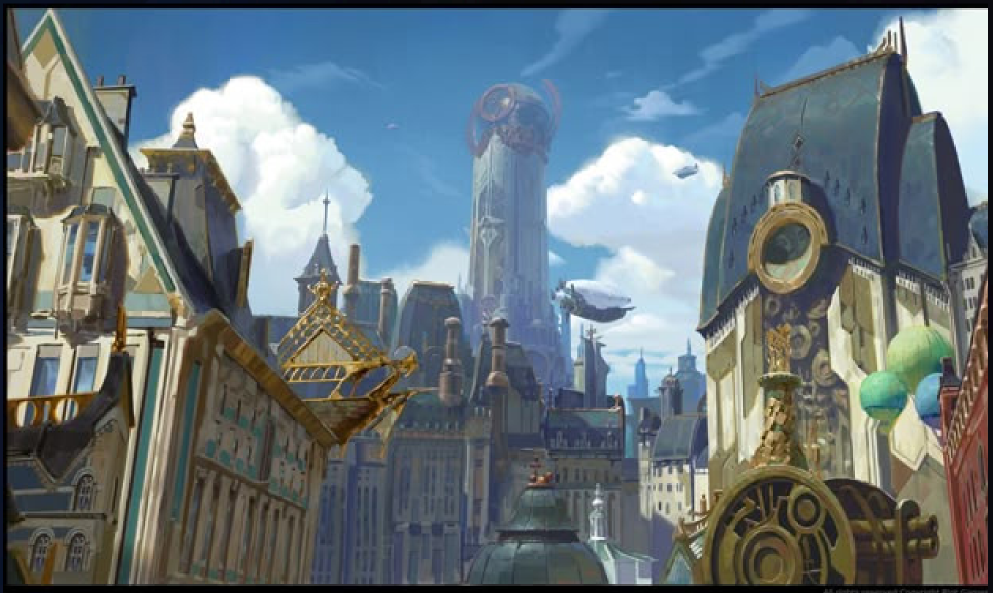
by: Karis Kim



Arcane, a steampunk action-adventure television series based on the video game *League of Legends* released in 2021, became Netflix's highest-rated series within a week of its premiere, ranking first on Netflix's Top 10 Chart in 52 countries and winning a Primetime Emmy Award, an Annie Award, and various film festivals.

Within the series, Piltover is a bright, rich utopia while its twin city Zaun is dark, impoverished, and oppressed. *Arcane*'s developers use visual language to silently convey the details dialogue can't fill. The disparity between the two cities are expressed through every mode possible, from their citizen's typified character designs, nuances and expression of dialogue, and, perhaps most evidently, their contrasting architecture.

The cities—especially Piltover—are based on the Art Nouveau style, which flourished from about 1890 to 1910. The style features flowing, organic lines, and takes inspiration from nature, which can immediately be seen through the metalwork on windows and doors. Originating in Brussels, it emerged as a deliberate attempt to create a new style that combated the styles that preceded it, breaking down barriers between fine arts (such as painting and sculpting) and applied arts (such as architecture and industrial design), a fitting philosophy for Piltover which prides itself on innovation and progress.



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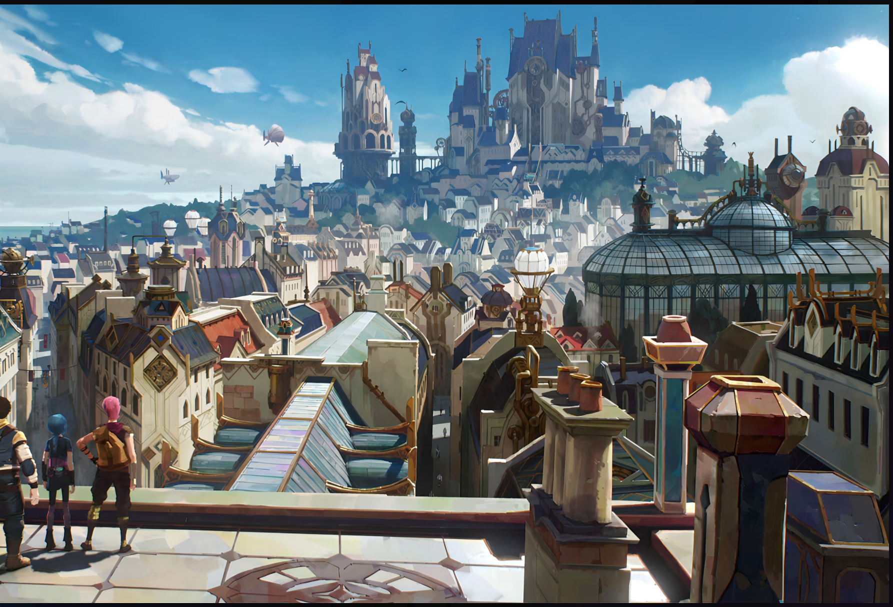
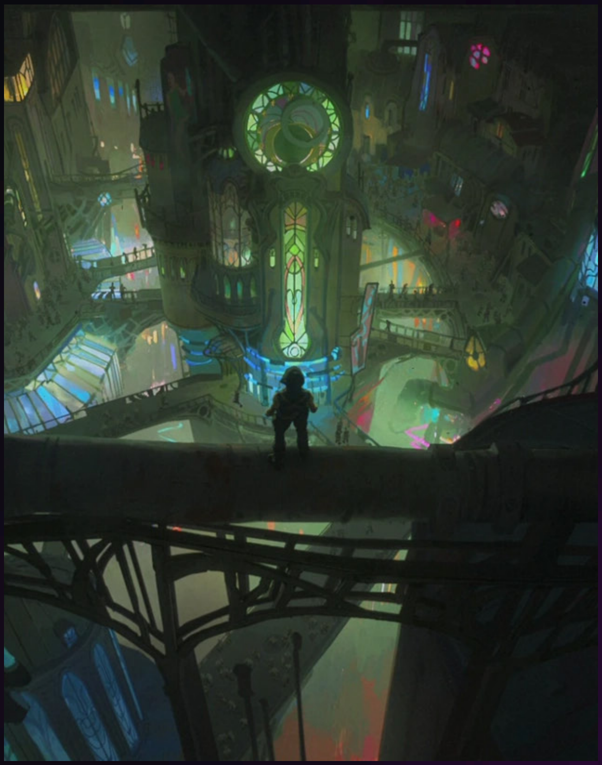
Piltover cityscape whose architecture is inspired by Art Nouveau

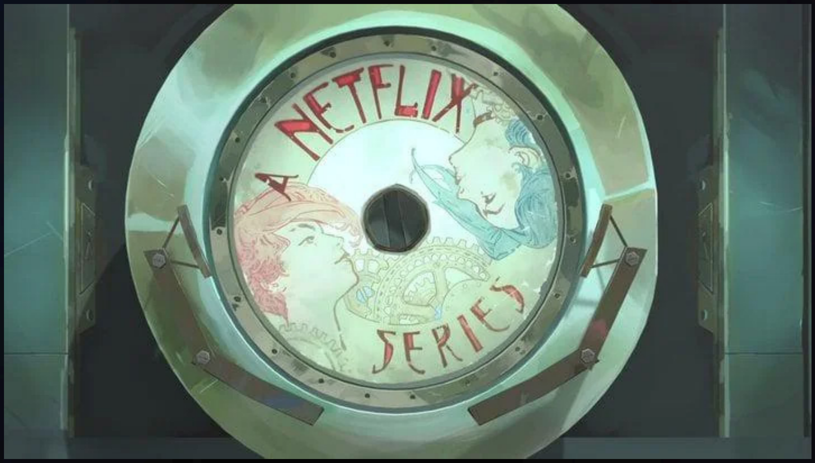


Piltover cityscape whose architecture is inspired by Art Nouveau

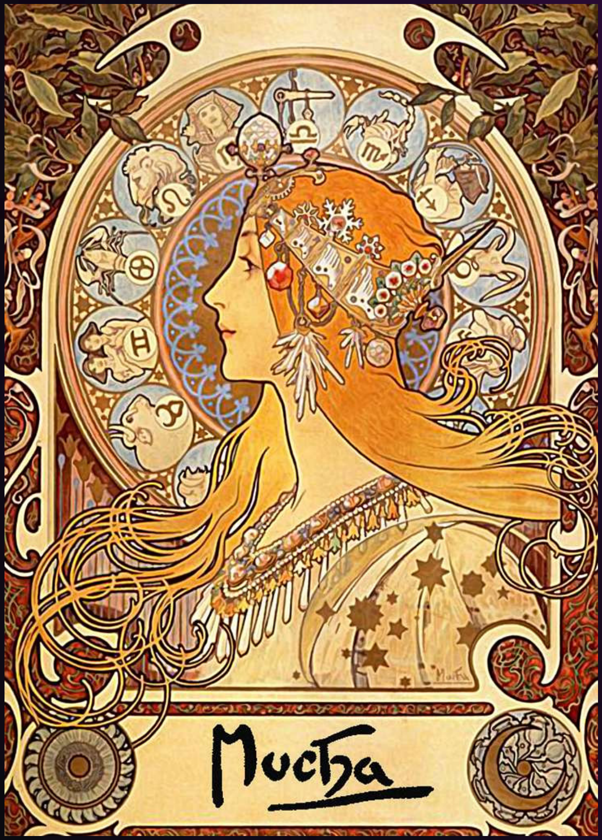


A center structure in the Lanes (i.e. Zaun) blending nouveau and Gothic styles

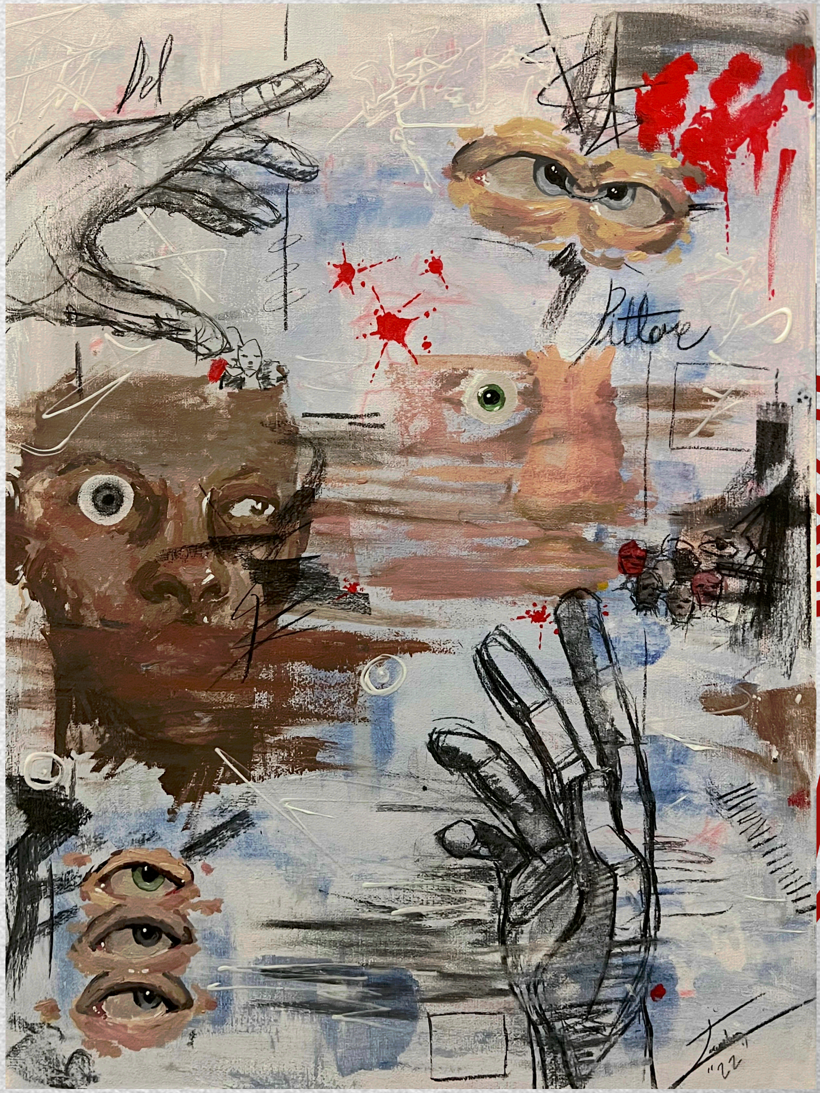
In particular, the works of Alphonse Mucha were especially influential on the world building of Arcane. A Czech artist who acts as one of the faces of Art Nouveau, Mucha's art style is characterized by his uniquely stylized and decorative theatrical posters. His impact reaches not only Arcane's architecture, but various other scenes as well; at the beginning of each episode, portraits of Vi and Jinx (looking as if they've stepped out of a Mucha illustration) spin a record.



A Mucha-inspired record of Vi and Jinx



Zodiac (1869) Alphonse Mucha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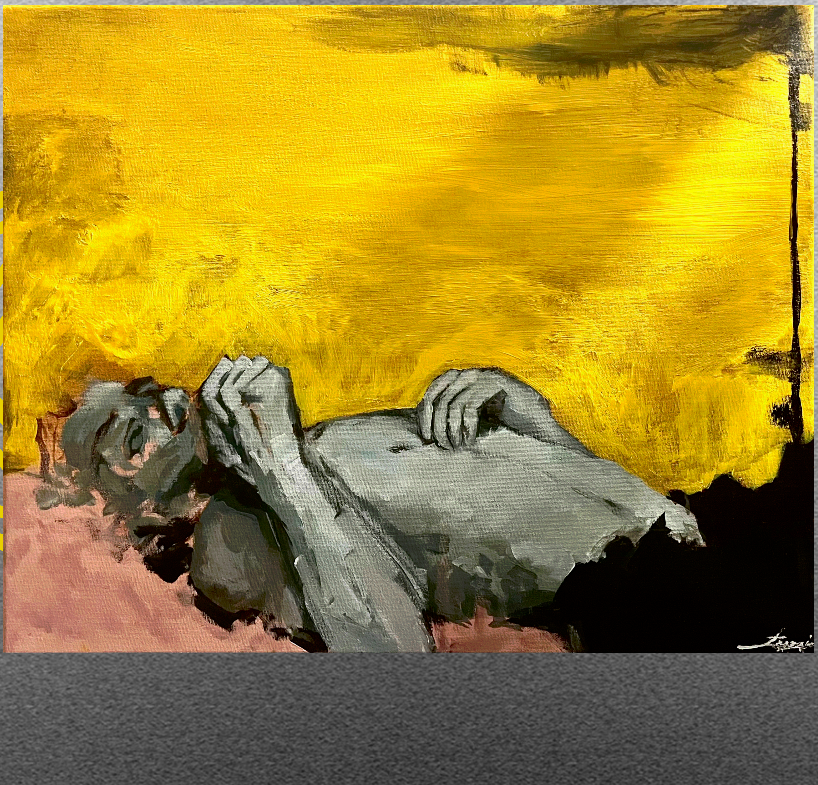
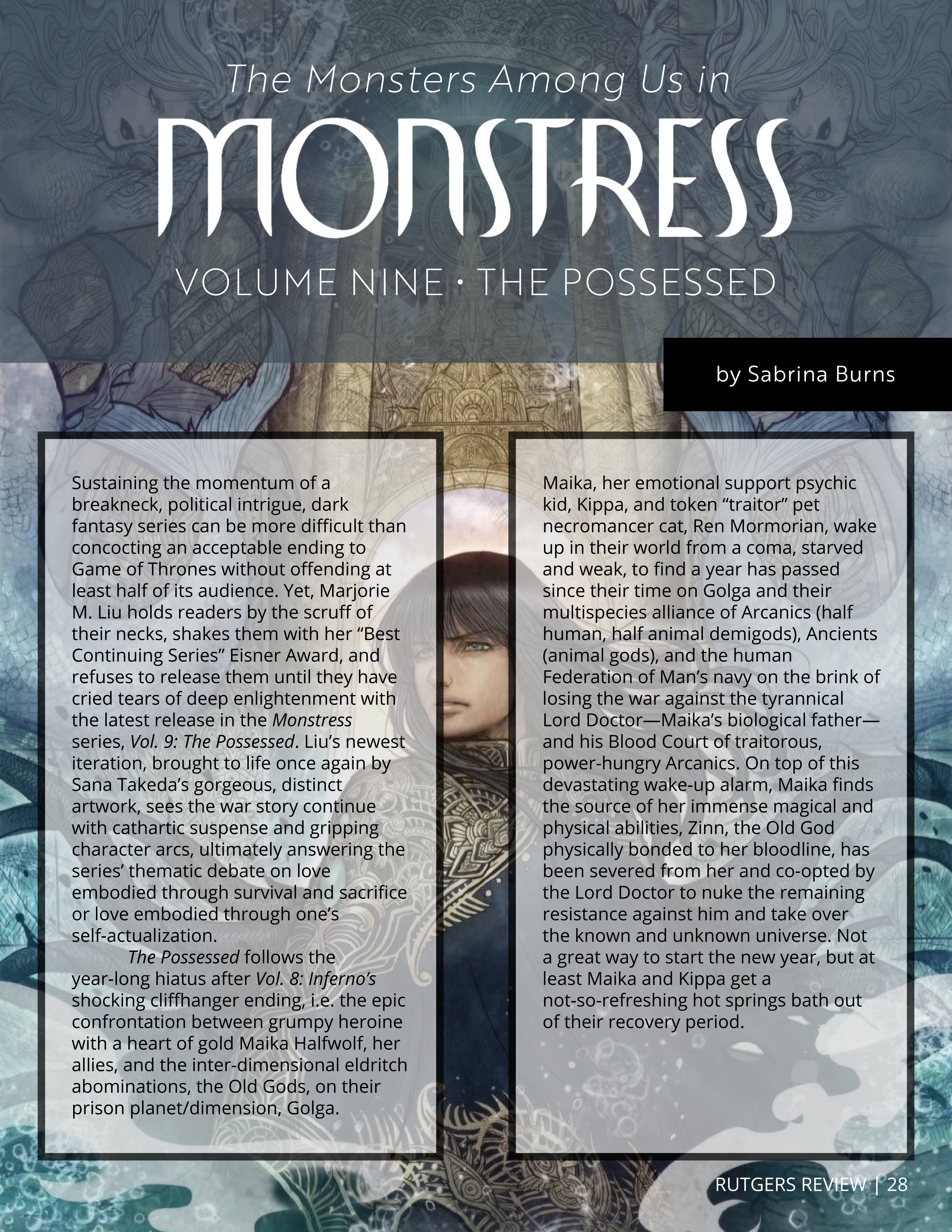




The Monsters Among Us in
MONSTRESS
VOLUME NINE • THE POSSESSED

by Sabrina Burns

Sustaining the momentum of a breakneck, political intrigue, dark fantasy series can be more difficult than concocting an acceptable ending to Game of Thrones without offending at least half of its audience. Yet, Marjorie M. Liu holds readers by the scruff of their necks, shakes them with her "Best Continuing Series" Eisner Award, and refuses to release them until they have cried tears of deep enlightenment with the latest release in the *Monstress* series, *Vol. 9: The Possessed*. Liu's newest iteration, brought to life once again by Sana Takeda's gorgeous, distinct artwork, sees the war story continue with cathartic suspense and gripping character arcs, ultimately answering the series' thematic debate on love embodied through survival and sacrifice or love embodied through one's self-actualization.

The Possessed follows the year-long hiatus after *Vol. 8: Inferno's* shocking cliffhanger ending, i.e. the epic confrontation between grumpy heroine with a heart of gold Maika Halfwolf, her allies, and the inter-dimensional eldritch abominations, the Old Gods, on their prison planet/dimension, Golga. Maika, her emotional support psychic kid, Kippa, and token "traitor" pet necromancer cat, Ren Mormorian, wake up in their world from a coma, starved and weak, to find a year has passed since their time on Golga and their multispecies alliance of Arcanics (half human, half animal demigods), Ancients (animal gods), and the human Federation of Man's navy on the brink of losing the war against the tyrannical Lord Doctor—Maika's biological father—and his Blood Court of traitorous, power-hungry Arcanics. On top of this devastating wake-up alarm, Maika finds the source of her immense magical and physical abilities, Zinn, the Old God physically bonded to her bloodline, has been severed from her and co-opted by the Lord Doctor to nuke the remaining resistance against him and take over the known and unknown universe. Not a great way to start the new year, but at least Maika and Kippa get a not-so-refreshing hot springs bath out of their recovery period.

The story picks up from there, steadily ramping up the tension panel by panel and reveling in the inevitable, mind-blowing plot twists which characterize the series. Readers gasp when they see Maika's battle hardened goddess-father, Seizi, bloody and in chains, at the hands (or more accurately, tentacles) of the Lord Doctor, Zinn his gruesome instrument of torture. They clutch their faces in horror when they see the Dusk Court developing armor for the Lord Doctor to control the Old Gods, betraying the court's fellow Arcanics for the irresistible taste of dominion. They cross their fingers that Maika will not inadvertently make an enemy of the Wave Court with her brash, coarse, hardheaded style of diplomacy. Etcetera, etcetera. The anticipation never dies down, and the binge reading neither stops.

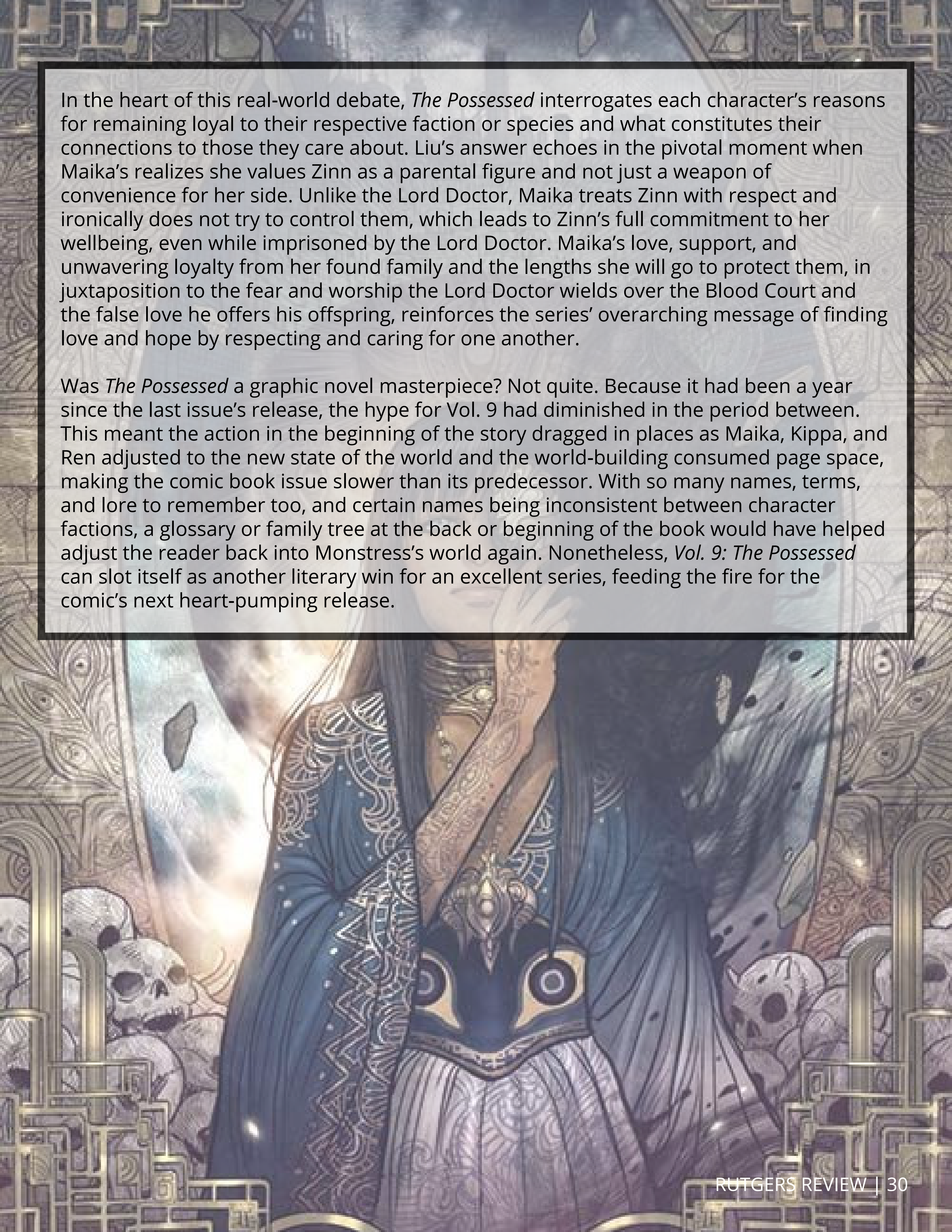
The characters' web of troubled relationships further twists and expands upon itself in novel directions as the Arcanic-Ancient-Federation Navy alliance grapples with its weakened standpoint. Supporting characters like Kippa and Ren benefit from renewed time in the spotlight—their bond with Maika and Zinn revealed to transcend the physical boundaries of bodies—and consequently enjoy deeper characterization that feeds into the story's thematic heart of love and survival. Kippa, for instance, shrugs off her much more powerful elders' dismissal of her young age and stature at every opportunity, embracing her newfound confidence in herself and proving again and again that she deserves the title for bravest hero. Kippa rebukes danger countless times to speak up for Maika's gallant past deeds, gleam information from volatile technologies and creatures, and prophesize the future from horrific visions of Old God hunger consuming her—foreshadowing a possible revelation of her link to a renegade faction of Old Gods. Ren too grows "a tail" and learns that being a true leader to his endangered species means stopping those who would betray it for short term goals, choosing found family over species loyalty. The two elevate the story from a simple war between opposing forces to a moral struggle over the ills of cowardice, xenophobia, and subservience.

Even the Lord Doctor grows a few layers thicker in complexity like the repugnant onion he is. Previous volumes portrayed the Lord Doctor as a formidable enemy with no known weaknesses, aside from his blind thirst for power, and only ominous displays of ruthless intelligence and political maneuvering which always sent Maika's team scrambling. Volume 9: *The Possessed*, in turn, reveals the demi-god descendant to suffer three major, concurrent weaknesses: the exhaustion of imprisoning and exploiting Zinn inside his conscious, his arrogance and underestimation of Maika's power of friendship™, and his inability to resist potential opportunities to gloat his power over others. His image as an unstoppable evil admittedly dampens a little to a genre-savvy reader who considers his glaring weaknesses, perhaps unveiled too soon in the series' run. Yet, the trade-off feels worth it when his flaws underpin his creepy desire to perpetuate his superior DNA, such as by preserving and cloning his offspring in a perverted paternal sense of protectiveness. My nomination for dad of the year.

The Possessed ties all these exciting elements constructed over the course of the series into a pretty little bow of difficult, compelling philosophical dilemmas centered around two vital questions. First, is the true foundation of love for one's family based on ensuring the family's survival at all costs; and, second, how much should any individual sacrifice to guarantee the family's continuance? In The *Possessed*, the 18th Century Asian (yes, as in the whole continent) and ancient Egyptian inspired backdrop and fantasy cultures calls to light the depth of the key themes. Many collective societies in Asia, and Egypt, struggle with the same balance between family survival, in the literal sense, and its family members' self-realization and fulfillment, which could be considered survival in the "thriving" sense, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs

In the heart of this real-world debate, *The Possessed* interrogates each character's reasons for remaining loyal to their respective faction or species and what constitutes their connections to those they care about. Liu's answer echoes in the pivotal moment when Maika's realizes she values Zinn as a parental figure and not just a weapon of convenience for her side. Unlike the Lord Doctor, Maika treats Zinn with respect and ironically does not try to control them, which leads to Zinn's full commitment to her wellbeing, even while imprisoned by the Lord Doctor. Maika's love, support, and unwavering loyalty from her found family and the lengths she will go to protect them, in juxtaposition to the fear and worship the Lord Doctor wields over the Blood Court and the false love he offers his offspring, reinforces the series' overarching message of finding love and hope by respecting and caring for one another.

Was *The Possessed* a graphic novel masterpiece? Not quite. Because it had been a year since the last issue's release, the hype for Vol. 9 had diminished in the period between. This meant the action in the beginning of the story dragged in places as Maika, Kippa, and Ren adjusted to the new state of the world and the world-building consumed page space, making the comic book issue slower than its predecessor. With so many names, terms, and lore to remember too, and certain names being inconsistent between character factions, a glossary or family tree at the back or beginning of the book would have helped adjust the reader back into Monstress's world again. Nonetheless, *Vol. 9: The Possessed* can slot itself as another literary win for an excellent series, feeding the fire for the comic's next heart-pumping release.



music

photo by Sahana Iyer

THE RISE OF DOECHII

BY AMBER SAFEER

If you have been anywhere on the internet at all this past year, then chances are you have come across an artist named Doechii. You may be thinking (as I so naively was) that this is the first you've heard of her – a true rise to stardom out of the blue. However, this could not be further from the truth. Doechii's fame has been a steady growth over nearly the last decade, despite only hitting the "mainstream" just recently. But in order to truly understand where she came from, let's work backward, from her most recent drop: *Alligator Bites Never Heal*.

Doechii's third mixtape, *Alligator Bites Never Heal* is both a nod to the artist's past as the self-proclaimed "Swamp Princess" from Florida, and her future in the industry. In her announcement post, Doechii describes how alligators perform a maneuver called a "death roll" to both submerge and dismember its prey below waters; she likens this to "what felt like a relentless death roll" in her own life in the past year. However, like survivors of the death roll, Doechii fights back, because she is the predator – The Swamp Ruler.

Stylistically, the mixtape is inherently experimental in nature, fusing elements of hip-hop, boom bap, R&B, heartfelt soul, mesmerizing vocals, and much more. As a theater kid (yes, she attended a Performing Arts school!), Doechii also meshes these musical elements with artistic storytelling and creative characters, citing Busta Rhymes as an inspiration for this type of theatrical influence.

In addition to her addicting lyricism, Doechii's stage presence while performing is incredible. The way that she commands the audience's attention with her infectious personality – whether it be on the Grammy's stage or at NPR's Tiny Desk – is a testament to her talent. She can write, sing, rap, dance, and act, and always takes the opportunity to show it. Not only that, but her creativity extends beyond her mixtapes, taking the liberty of hosting 1-hour writing periods called *Swamp Sessions* and releasing *Denial Is A River Show* in the leadup to the song's music video release.

In Doechii's increasingly popular *DENIAL IS A RIVER*, Doechii reflects on her past, referencing how "Wristwatch, drip drop, labels want the TikToks / Now I'm making TikTok music, what the fuck?" Here, Doechii alludes to the viral audios that brought her digital fame, from the iconic "Hi, my names Doechii with two i's / I feel anxious when I'm high" from *Yucky Blucky Fruitcake* to her collab *What It Is (Block Boy)* with Kodak Black. While these songs catapulted Doechii to the charts, it wasn't the music she wanted to make – hence why her sound in *Alligator Bites Never Heal* is so much more unique.

Before her Grammys and TikTok virality, however, Doechii was *still* creating: on YouTube. On both her verified *Doechii* channel and her second channel *Iamdoechii*, Doechii was posting everything from vlogs and storytimes to what later became called the “Coven Music Session,” her first mixtape. It is clear from these older videos that the world fell in love with Doechii not only because of her sheer talent and creative prowess, but because of her beaming persona and willingness to be honest with her audience. Doechii is real, sparking serious conversations about embracing sexuality, overcoming substance abuse, and fighting racial and gender stereotypes in the industry. Overwhelmingly, Doechii is a role model to everyone out there as a reminder to keep going, no matter your circumstances or what others may argue.

In 2024 and 2025, Doechii continues to blossom, featuring on Tyler the Creator’s *Balloon* and JENNIE’s *ExtraL* as well as launching *anxietyis-watching-me.com*, a mental health resource hub for navigating anxiety based on her song of the same name. It is evident that Doechii is growing to be one of the most influential stars of our time in both music and activism, and I cannot wait to see what she creates next. For the readers, I encourage you to get up to date on Doechii’s current discography, and follow where her artistic journey leads.

Enter the Swamp.

THE WORLD ENDED
when it happened to Lane Kim

by kayla gonzales

The lyrics of "We Hug Now" by Sydney Rose capture the essence of Lane Kim, a character from the hit TV show *Gilmore Girls*. Lane was a Korean-American girl raised in the small, tight-knit town of Stars Hollow by her mother, a strict Seventh-Day Adventist follower. In contrast, her best friend, Rory Gilmore, was the town's sweetheart and the sole granddaughter of the wealthy Gilmore family.

The show portrayed Lane as someone who always received the short end of the stick. From childhood, she struggled to form a healthy, loving relationship with her mother. She secretly spent years collecting rock CDs, makeup, and clothes, fearing retaliation from her mom (Mrs. Kim). Lane craved independence through her rebelliousness, and I spent the entirety of the show rooting for her, hoping for the big wins that would show the world how special she truly was.

The writers gave Lane the perfect "boy next door" in her relationship with Dave Rygalski. He brought her into his band, helped her grow as a drummer, and became her rock. It was love at first sight for both of them. Dave played acoustic guitar at every religious gathering, ate Mrs. Kim's food, and willingly snuck around to prevent Lane from getting in trouble. He even confessed his love to her by telling Mrs. Kim that he spent the night reading the Bible to understand her better. Although their relationship was brief, Dave proved himself to be one of the best boyfriends in the show.

> *Sometimes, I go to sleep, and I'm still seventeen.*
> *You still live down my street.*
> *You're not mad at me.*

This happy ending was short-lived. Dave's actor left the show to pursue a more prominent role, leaving the writers to fill the huge gap he left behind. After Dave, Lane's storyline took a turn for the worse. Her mother discovered her secret music collection, kicked her out of the house, forced her to attend Seventh-Day Adventist college, and semi-disowned her after discovering Lane moved in with her male bandmates. The chorus of "We Hug Now" represents the innocence of Lane's first real love. She was young, hopeful, full of ambition, and clueless about the complete 180 her life was about to take. As she struggled to rekindle her relationship with her mom, Lane developed feelings for her bandmate Zach, who failed to live up to the expectations that Dave had set.

Zach cost the band a potential record deal and even spent all the money Lane saved from their small tour. Everything they had worked tirelessly to achieve vanished in an instant. Lane had to watch everyone around her succeed and achieve their dreams, but she never even had the chance to pursue hers.

> *I have a feeling you got everything you wanted, and you're not wasting time stuck here like me.*

These lyrics evoke the parallels between Rory and Lane. Lane watched every guy fall head over heels for Rory. She watched her go off to college, travel the world, and get a shot at leaving their small town. The show's final season ended with Zach and Lane getting married, getting pregnant on their disastrous honeymoon, having twins, and being unable to pursue music. Lane had to give up her dreams of being a rockstar on tour at 22. She had no choice but to stay stuck in a town she once hoped to leave.

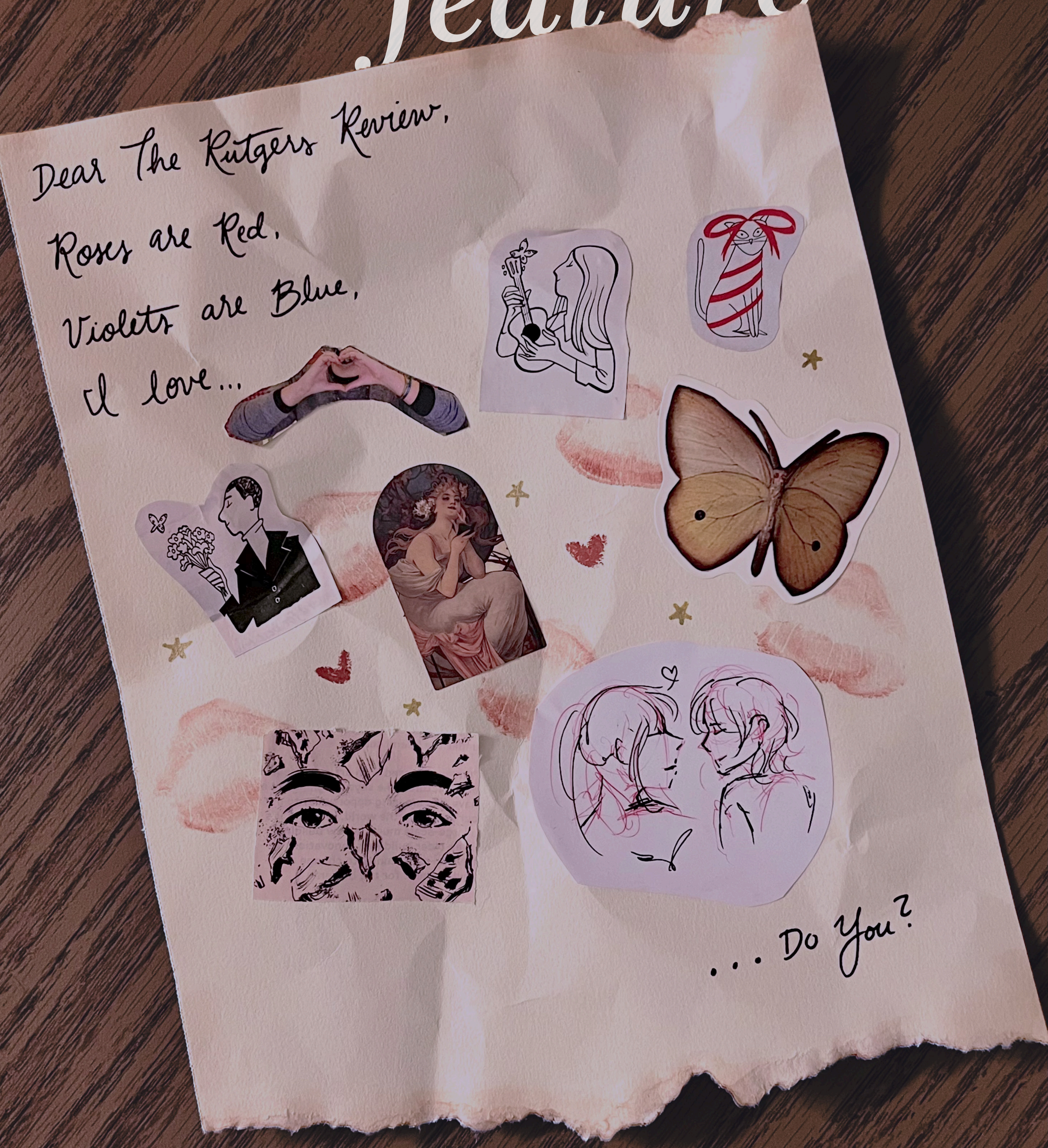
> *You're just thinking it's a small thing that happened. The world ended when it happened to me.*

Everything's so screwed up.
My life. Everything I'm doing.

Rory had the privilege to leave behind responsibilities and focus on getting her life together. Although she was raised by a single mother, she always had the Gilmore legacy to fall back on. Even when she advocated for paving her own path, her social status allowed her to recover quickly. For Rory, Lane's pregnancy was simply something that happened to her best friend. For Lane, her world ended before she could explore it. In the *Gilmore Girls* spin-off titled *A Year in the Life*, we glimpse Lane's life a decade after having twins. She took over the family business and now runs the antique shop with the same tough attitude her mother had. She occasionally plays drums at the secret bar in town. She's content with her life, but the viewer can't help but know that she was destined for so much more.

Lane Kims storyline, through the lyrics of Sydney Rose, portrays a longing for a life that is always just a little out of reach. Her choices after Dave trapped her in ways she never could have anticipated. Lane's emotional baggage weighed her down so much that packing up to leave was never an option. Instead, she conformed to the cycle her own mother had followed: settle down, get married, have a child to continue the family legacy, and pass on traditions to future generations. In the show's overall plot, this may seem like just a small thing that happened. However, for Lane, ***the world ended when it happened to her.***

feature



Dear The Rutgers Review,

Roses are Red,
Violets are Blue,
I love...

... Do You?

photo by Amber Safeer

ALBUMS *i love*

by kayla gonzales

My absolute favorite albums are *5SOS5* by 5 Seconds of Summer, *Stick Season (We'll All Be Here Forever)* by Noah Kahan, and *brent ii* by Jeremy Zucker and Chelsea Cutler. I will never tire of immersing myself in every lyric, every melody, and every song on these albums. Each one holds a special place in my heart and has explained what love, heartbreak, guilt, passion, nostalgia, and gratitude are all at once.

5 Seconds of Summer has been my favorite band for almost a decade, and I've grown into new life stages through every album released. 5SOS5 was released in 2022, my first month in college. I was navigating new experiences, uncharted territory, and learning to balance school, work, and a social life. All 19 tracks on 5SOS5 allowed me to step back, relive the joy of being a preteen, and envelop myself in the band's music. My top five tracks (in no particular order) are "Bad Omens," "Moodswings," "Bleach," "Carousel," and "Easy For You To Say." In 2023, I got to experience some of these songs live at The 5SOS Show Tour in Madison Square Garden with my best friends. It was truly a surreal moment to be in the world's most famous arena while screaming back lyrics I've loved for years to my favorite band. The lyrics that best sum up this album would be, "These bad omens, I look right through them / That's what you do when you love somebody" from track 3, "Bad Omens."

As someone who's lived in NJ her whole life, I find Stick Season (We'll All Be Here Forever) by Noah Kahan to feel inexplicably like home. When this extended album dropped, I was on a week-long trip in Maine, reconnecting with nature and family away from the confines of my desk and computer screen. Although the album has strong ties to the seasons of fall and winter, to me, this album will always feel like a 70-degree summer in Maine. My top five tracks are "Growing Sideways," "You're Gonna Go Far," "Everywhere, Everything," "All My Love," and "Come Over." Noah writes music in a way that makes you want to inject it into your veins. It's so emotionally raw and powerful, perfectly accompanied by themes of self-reflection, identity, and all seven stages of grief. The lyrics that best represent this album are "The things that I lost here, the people I knew / They got me surrounded for a mile or two / The car's in reverse, I'm gripping the wheel / I'm back between villages, and everything's still" from track 14, "The View Between Villages."

Everything Jeremy Zucker and Chelsea Cutler produce together is pure magic. They created the world of brent in three parts, closing the story off with brent iii in 2024. brent ii is technically an EP, consisting of five beautiful songs that last a mere 16 minutes and 59 seconds. This EP came out during my junior year of high school, two years after the original project came out during my freshman year.

EVERYTHING **Jeremy Zucker** & **Chelsea Cutler** produce together is *pure magic.*

NOAH KAHAN
STICK SEASON
(We'll All Be Here Forever)

It felt like a milestone being marked, reminding me that there were brighter days ahead. As there are only five songs, my ranking from most favorite to least is "this is how you fall in love," "emily," "brooklyn boy," "parent song," and "the stars." I hate to say the "least favorite" because "the stars" allows Chelsea to shine through on her own solo song, and it's one of my favorite songs from her discography. The lyrics that best represent this album are "This is how you fall in love / Let go, and I'll hold you up / So pull me tight and close your eyes / Oh, my love, side to side" from track 1, "this is how you fall in love."

My love letter to these three albums hardly grasps the emotions that course through me on every listen. It's a visceral feeling that I struggle to put into words because of how much I appreciate the heart and soul poured into the songs. To 5SOS, Noah Kahan, Jeremy Zucker, and Chelsea Cutler, thank you for writing my favorite comfort albums. I will cherish them forever.

i love GREEN

by amber safeer

When I was younger, I had a deep devotion to the color yellow. It was in the clothes I wore, the art I painted, the stationery I collected – I could not get enough of it. Yellow was happiness and joy. In a world full of darkness and my mind full of anxieties, it was light. Yellow still is these things to me.

However, it is no longer my favorite color. I find that the colors I am drawn to directly reflect what I am missing most in life; it fills that absence in only the way a hue can. This is why, as of the last five years, **green has been my favorite color**.

Perhaps it happened because of the pandemic that sheltered me from the outside world. Perhaps it happened because I felt unbearably stuck playing with the deck of cards I had been dealt. Whatever the reason, green was on my radar. It was lush life, new beginnings, prosperity, and health. Suddenly, in the blink of an eye, green was the color of all my clothing, my backpack, the decorations in my bedroom, the gardens and lawns I fawned over every time I stepped outside.

In its deepest form, green is a forest with pine trees to get lost in. Green is the emeralds that I find in the jewelry of my birthstone. Green is the seaweed I eat on sushi and the crisp lettuce on a refreshing sandwich. Green is the frog I search for in the sea of lily pads that cover the algae-ridden lake. Green is the smell of sage as I walk into the spiritual crystal stores that try to sell me tarot cards. Green is the flavor of my favorite Thin Mint cookies. Green is the color of the grass that my dog rolls around in. Green is the child-like wonder of plucking pretty weeds from the ground.

And yet, green has so many contradictions. Green is greed, envy, evil, sickness, decay, and repulsion. It is these very juxtapositions, however, that draw me towards green even more. Green harbors negativity in order to emphasize its optimism. Like a human, it is not one-note; green is a complex creature capable of many emotions. These varying hues – some with tints of white, shades of black, or mixtures of other colors – are so comforting to me. There is a green for every part of me. Green may not remain my favorite color forever, but it will always be beautiful to me so long as I have the pleasure to keep existing alongside it.

Love Songs

By Ishika Dhawan

Love songs have always been my favorite genre of music. There's something magical about listening to someone pour their heart out, longing for that special someone. These songs have a way of making us feel deeply, but why? Why do love songs leave such a strong impact on us?

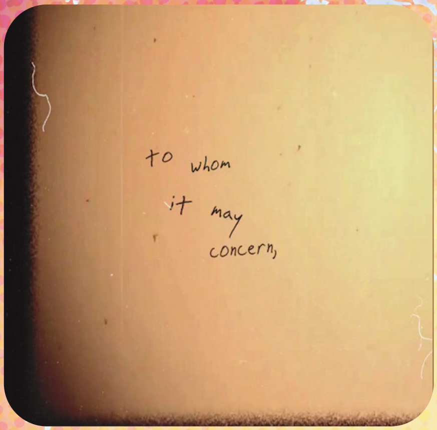
I believe that almost every song ever written is, in some way, a love song. The world around us is full of love—love for people, places, memories, and even ourselves. As humans, we are wired to love, and music is one of the most powerful ways we express that emotion. Love songs help us connect with those feelings, whether we realize it or not. They validate our emotions, help us process heartbreak, and remind us of the love we hold in our hearts.

I have a friend who barely listened to music for 18 years. Then, she got her heart broken. All of a sudden, I was receiving song recommendations every other day. When I listened, I was amazed at how accurately her song choices reflected her current situationship. It was as if music was giving her the words that she couldn't say herself. Love songs were my friend's way of processing her feelings.

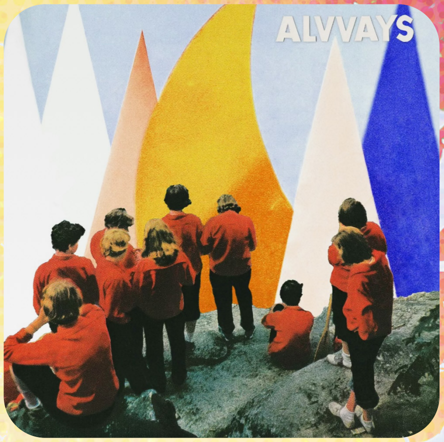
On a scientific level, love songs trigger dopamine and oxytocin. Studies show that listening to music raises dopamine levels—the "feel good" chemicals in our brain. Love songs, in particular, boost oxytocin, which is often called the "love hormone." This combination is what creates the feeling of warmth and comfort that love songs bring with them.

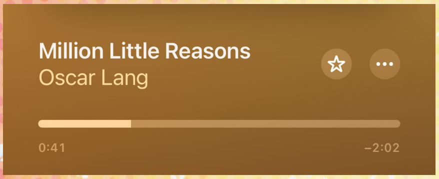
Love songs are more than just music—they're experiences. They tap into our memories, both good and bad, to help us make sense of our feelings or even romanticize emotions we yearn for. Whether they bring comfort, nostalgia, or excitement, love songs will always remain timeless because love itself is timeless.

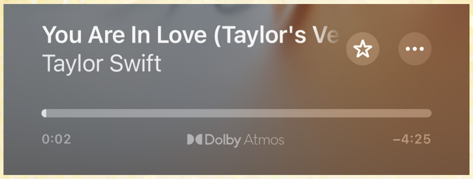
And of course, I had to end this article with 5 love songs that I think everyone should listen to at least once in their lives:

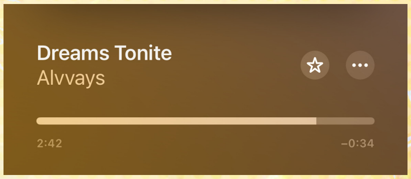

to whom
it may
concern,

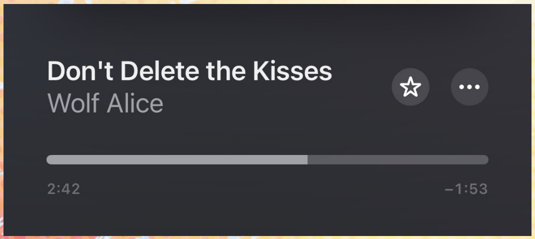
1989
TAYLOR'S VERSION

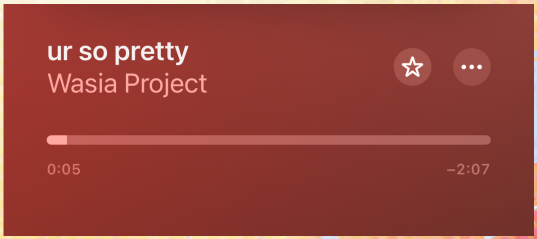



Million Little Reasons
Oscar Lang
0:41 −2:02


You Are In Love (Taylor's Ve
Taylor Swift
0:02 Dolby Atmos −4:25


Dreams Tonite
Alvvays
2:42 −0:34


Don't Delete the Kisses
Wolf Alice
2:42 −1:53


ur so pretty
Wasia Project
0:05 −2:07

Roses are Red, Violets are Blue, I Love Cognitive Science, So Should You!

By Sahana Iyer

Rechte Großhirnhälfte
Innere Stirnwdg.
Linke Groß-hirnhälfte
Rechte Groß-hirnhälfte
Mittlere Stirnwindung
Hintere Zentralwindung
Mittlere Seitenbein-windung
Hinterhauptswindungen

Cognitive Science changed the way I live life.

I applied to Rutgers as an undecided major. I have never been one of those people who chased distant dreams with fierce certainty and confidence. I like to deliberate my options. And by deliberation, I am really referring to avoidance. I make valiant attempts to stall my decision-making.

I constantly fear being pigeonholed into a journey that I may end up hating halfway through. The future will always be uncertain, to a certain degree, and I sometimes fail to see the point in planning too far ahead.

This is a problem for an indecisive college student.

While most American universities advertise their endless major selections, they don't offer the flexibility to explore a variety of them. On average, just major requirements alone take two-to-three years to complete. Students often have to fulfill general education and sometimes honors requirements as well. Switching majors, especially to an unrelated field, comes with additional time and cost.

But then, I took Introduction to Cognitive Science in the fall of 2021 at my dad's insistence (and my freshman-year roommate also happened to be registered for it). My mind was blown.

Contrary to what one may intuit, cognitive science is not solely equivalent to neuroscience. Nor is it just another term for psychology. Cognitive science is an interdisciplinary study of the mind that entails researchers from many fields, such as linguistics, philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, computer science, and anthropology, pursuing the overarching question of the human experience. What makes the mind? What can we claim about human cognition?

The Cognitive Revolution occurred in the 1950s, marking a paradigm shift in how scientists contemplated the human mind. Before this era, Behaviorism dominated all psychological discourse. It was thought that human beings and animals were simply responding to external stimuli, as in, all behavioral responses can be pinned down to occurrences in the outside world. This theory has long been dispelled.

Cognitive science is a mission to uncover factors beyond sensory experience that contribute to human knowledge. A popular thesis in the field is that the human mind is a computing machine that comes with pre-programmed cognitive architectures. For example, studies have shown that infants as young as nine minutes old can detect person-like faces and eyes, and show a preference for objects with person-like appearances.

Noam Chomsky, a leading figure in cognitive science and linguistics, proposed his Universal Grammar theory– humans possess an innate, biological capacity for language acquisition.

The concept of innateness, that we are born with the capacity to speak and interact with one another, is arguably the coolest thing I learned from my cognitive science classes among others. There are systems already in place at the moment of our conception that facilitate our learning.

Cognitive science is still a relatively new field (emerging around the same time as computer science discoveries were made in the mid-20th century), and so much discovery is yet to be made. Did you know that AI research groups and projects actually began during the 1960s?

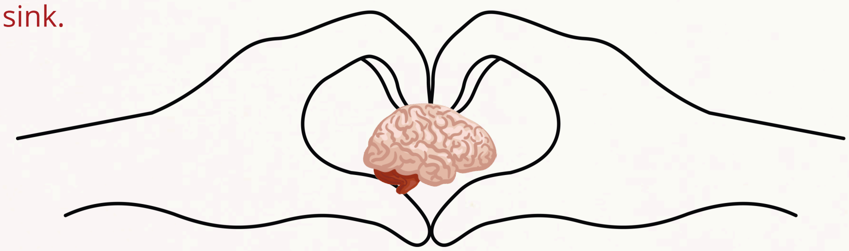
With my newfound fascination, I just had to major in cognitive science. And for an indecisive college student, this is the best decision I made.

At Rutgers, cognitive science is almost equivalent to a DIY major. Like other standard majors, we do have requirements. We have to take the intro course (of course), a computational/logical reasoning course, and a statistical reasoning course. We also have to take three courses, each from a different track: cognitive neuroscience, decision-making, language, 'minds, machines, and computation,' and perception. The cognitive science department provides us with the opportunity to choose classes from various departments to fulfill these requirements. Eventually, we are asked to focus on a track. I still received a well-rounded college experience.

Throughout my time here, I have taken Semantics (linguistics), Behavioral and Experimental Economics, Game Theory, Fundamentals of Cognitive Neuroscience, Programming for Behavioral Scientists, Abnormal Psychology, Cognition and Decision Making, a few philosophy classes, and more. I am so lucky to have been able to explore many fields (all of which make up cognitive science). Due to the diverse course selections, one can become anything as a cognitive science major. The word is truly your oyster.

I have friends who went on to pursue public health occupations. Some other people end up as software engineers, lawyers, or doctors. One friend of mine is planning to go into UI/UX design. Me? I aspire to get into a PhD program focused on cognitive development and the origins of social cognition.

So, to all my readers out there who are either confused about their career path or absolutely excited to dive into the study of our minds, major in cognitive science!!! It's a beautiful combination of science, arts, humanities, and maybe even the kitchen sink.



photos by
Julia Burgess

potpourri

photo by Kayla Gonzales

Trois Circle
262
MADE IN CHINA

IN ITALY, I LEARNED TO LIKE COFFEE

by Sophie D'Errico

This past semester I have been studying abroad in Florence, Italy.

In Italy, coffee is king. I first ordered a coffee while at a cafe with my friends between classes. I chose a cappuccino since my typical drink, an iced chai latte, is not popular in Italy and cappuccinos are, apart from being iconic, one of the cheapest items on the menu.

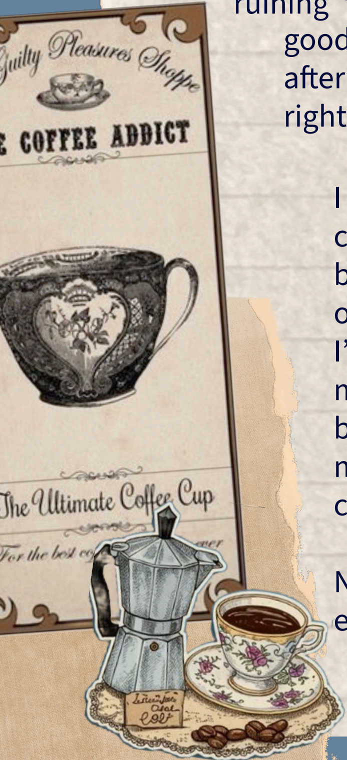
The drink came to me at the table in a green mug with a white foamy design on top. There is so much care in a drink that is not to-go. I poured the packet of sugar resting on the saucer into the mug, ruining the design, but for the greater good, because when I took a first sip after stirring, it was warm, sweet, and right.

I had never truly had a cup of coffee– only a few sips followed by grimaces and wonderments over why people enjoy drinking it. I'm not sure if my palette had matured or if Italian espresso is better than American, or if it was a mix of both– but I thought this coffee was delicious.

Now, to be clear, this is not an essay about how coffee changed my life, nor is it a greater metaphor for trying new things and getting out of my comfort zone. It was just coffee.

However, it did get me thinking about my greater experience abroad as the final weeks encroached upon me.

Studying abroad has been a whirlwind of activity. Weekends are full of train rides and airport terminals, new cities and countries, walking thirty thousand steps each day, staying up late, waking up early. It's a tough lifestyle to sustain. As such, I've relied on the weekdays to revive my energy, and the small rituals I found in those days.


Guilty Pleasures Shoppe
COFFEE ADDICT
The Ultimate Coffee Cup

the arno river

FIR
FORTEZZA DA BASSO
VIALE
F. STROZZI
PIAZZA della INDIPENDENZA
STAZIONE CENTRALE
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S. MARIA NOVELLA
MERCATO CENTR.
CAPPELLE MEDICEE

MEMORY
TITLE

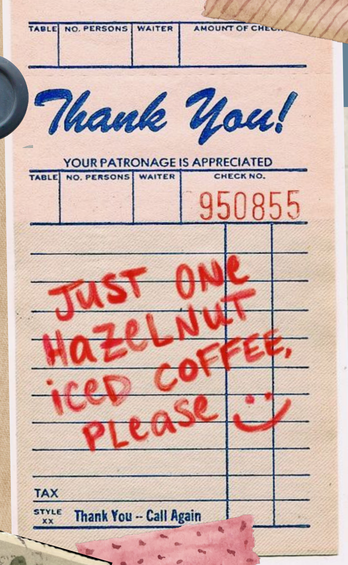


TABLE | NO. PERSONS | WAITER | AMOUNT OF CHEC

Thank You!

YOUR PATRONAGE IS APPRECIATED

TABLE | NO. PERSONS | WAITER | CHECK NO.

950855

JUST ONE HazeLNUT iced coFFee, PLease :)

TAX

STYLE XX Thank You -- Call Again

My walk to class in the morning was my favorite right next to my apartment was Palazzo Pitti, the grand former palace of the Medici, which made me pinch myself and how lucky I was to live in this city for a few months. On my walk, I passed by pieces of street art that became familiar landmarks. At the end of my street was a re-creation of Man in a Bowler Hat by Rene Magritte painted across a square, gray, utility box. Close by was another street art work of Monet's Japanese footbridge, with a man riding over it on a bike as he made a Glovo delivery, Italy's Doordash.

I'd pass gelaterias, cafes, and vintage shops on either side of the street. The cobblestone sidewalks are too narrow for the crowds, so people spilled into the road, weaving between taxis, vespas, and Fiats. Then I'd turn right and walk along the Arno river. The water, usually a glassy green, reflected the ochre-colored buildings that line its banks. Each building looks similar, but they vary slightly in color and texture. Some are flat and pale gray, others are rough, in shades of yellow or burnt orange. The buildings are lined with rows of rectangular windows– some framed by slate shutters, others by emerald green ones with balconies below.

Then I would cross the stone bridge over the water. Some days the river was calm, and on others, particularly after a rain, it rushed murky beneath me.

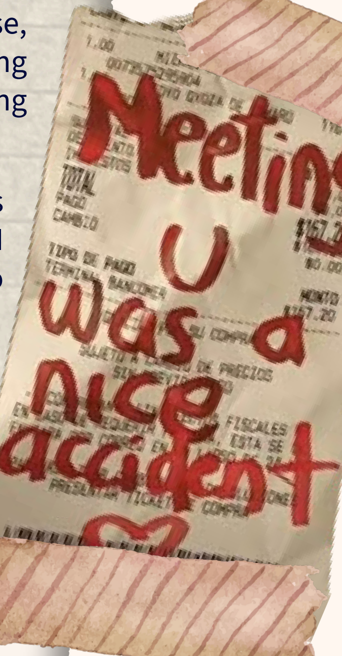
One afternoon after class I ventured into the Boboli Gardens behind Palazzo Pitti. I explored until I found a cozy spot in the sun to rest and read my book. When I wanted a break, I would discover a different comfortable spot and begin journaling. I filled the afternoon this way– me, the gardens, and a cycle of reading, writing, and people-watching.

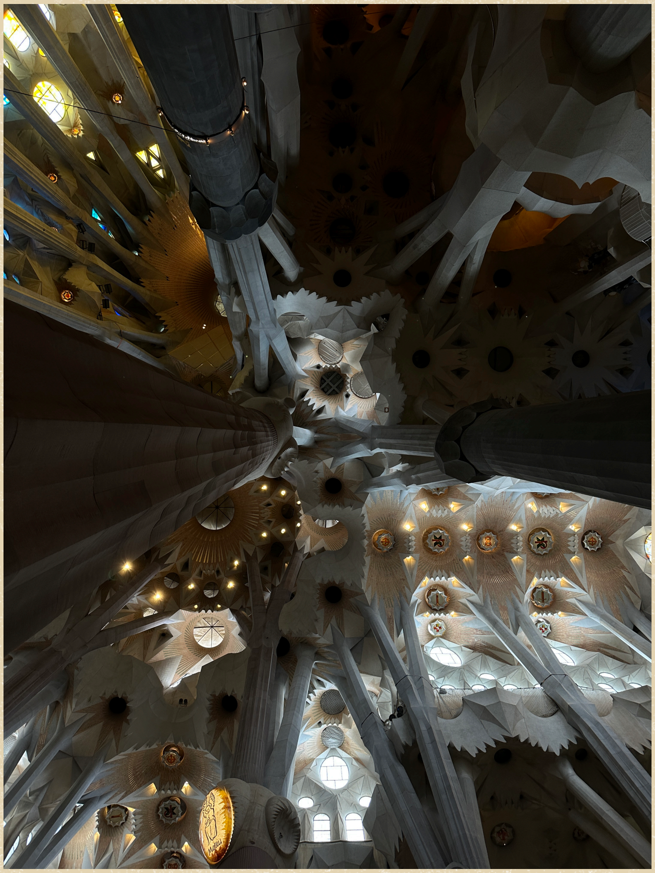
So, while there were many whirlwind, exciting moments that I will remember forever– museums, landmarks, mischievous nights– it's the small moments of peace that felt the most impactful.

Again, this is not to say that trying cappuccinos cured my fear of the unknown, or helped me discover the beauty of uncomfortability. Frankly, sometimes the caffeine gave me a bit of an uncomfortable feeling, feeling too jittery to sit through my history class.

But what stuck with me wasn't the caffeine– it was the ritual of occasionally having a warm cup, of watching the steam rise, pouring in my sugar, sipping from a colorful mug, and feeling connected to the city.

It's still just coffee, but now it's mine. And at the very least, I finally have something to order at a cafe besides an iced chai latte.


Meeting U was a nice accident



ROOF TOP
TO GO

photos by

Katherine Costa

ALL THINGS SUMMER!

By Sanskriti Ramji

These past few weeks have been filled with some of my favorite moments from the whole semester. The sun has been out, the Voorhees Mall lawn has been filled with cheerful students playing and picnicking, and there's been a general sense of excitement about what we're approaching – summer! I think one of the best parts of college (besides the experiences on-campus, obviously), has to be the four month-long summer vacation. Like many of you, I'm already making plans with friends and picturing myself going on bike rides, watching sunsets, and making frequent visits to my favorite ice cream shop. Despite my love for this season and the break, I find that there are times when I don't know how to make the most of all it has to offer. So, I thought I'd make a guide to summer activities that will make you fall more in love with this season!

PICNICKING

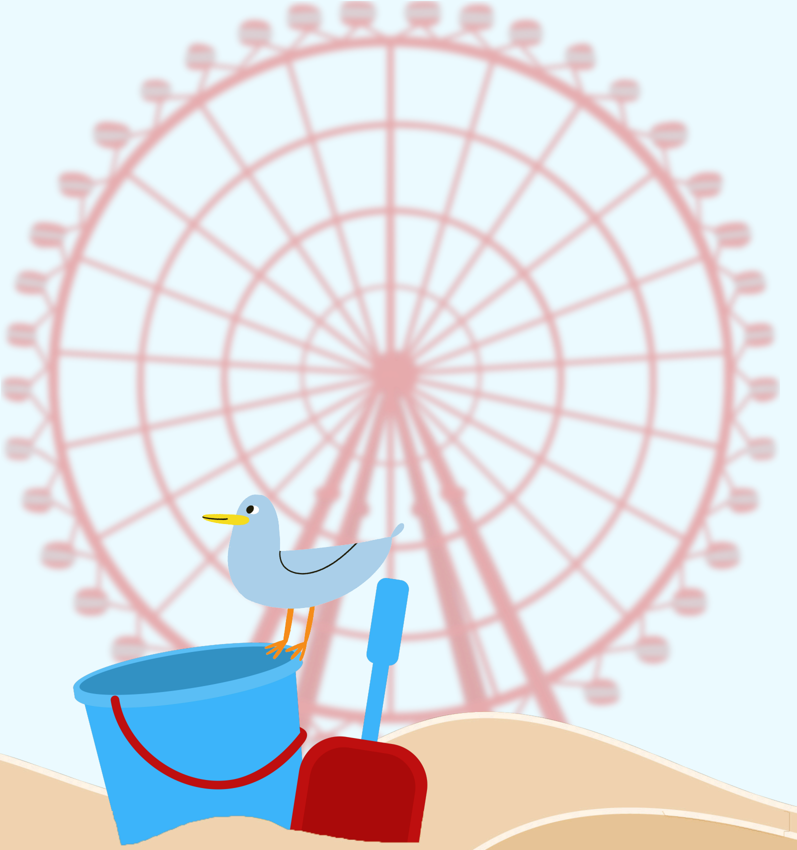
Picnics can be a fun way to cook and share food with friends while enjoying quality time outdoors! While snacks and charcuterie boards are a welcome addition, I personally think a picnic can also just mean setting down a blanket at a local park or scenic spot to spend an evening with your friends. For my best friends and I, that means chatting for hours and entertaining ourselves with many games of Heads Up!. For my sister and I, it means playing our favorite board games – Scrabble and Bananagrams – while enjoying views of the sunset together. In fact, a couple of summers ago, we even took some canvases and art supplies to a calm area by the water and made our own sunset paintings! My masterpiece is on-display in my dorm room, but more importantly, the experience itself was a fun and memorable way for us to enjoy each other's company. This is why I love picnics so much. They can take on any form, but no matter what, you get to appreciate summer weather with the people you love.

CRAFTING

I'll admit I haven't explored crafting too much yet, but I have seen many of my friends pick up projects over the summer that have lasted into the school year. Similar to picnicking, I like that crafting is versatile and can take on different meanings for different people depending on their interests and free time. A great starting point are beaded crafts like bracelet-making and embroidering which can help build focus and patience, while requiring few materials. If you have more time, consider learning how to cross-stitch, sew, or crochet; I know many people who find these hobbies soothing and useful when it comes to gift-giving or making their own clothing. A lower commitment alternative that my friends and I tend to opt for is painting canvases or pottery at our local studio to relax while enjoying good conversation. Whatever projects you choose, I find crafting to be peaceful and productive, giving me something to work toward each day along with a sense of pride in my hard work.

OUTDOOR SPORTS

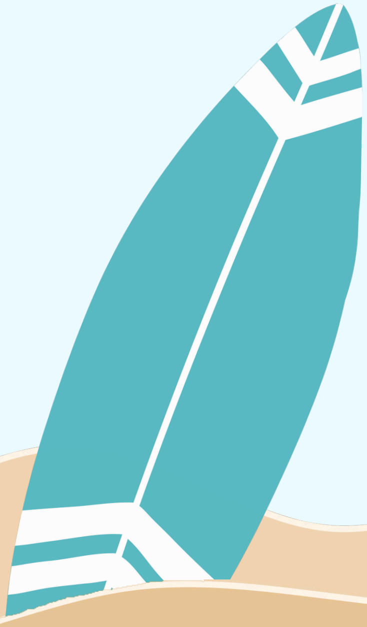
During the summer, I try to have outdoor physical activity to look forward to. For me, that means going biking at a local trail or park, or playing pickleball in the evening at a local court. The easiest way to find a sport or activity and stay consistent with it is to find a group of friends who will encourage you to be active with them. A few summers ago my dad and I found a local pickleball group in our town which we have since become active members of. So, even if your interests are different from your friends, ask around at a local park, recreation center, or gym and you may be able to find a community that you can join! Beyond building a routine, there are also fun sports you can try once in a while. My family enjoys going canoeing or kayaking a couple times every summer and it makes for some humorous memories and intense exercise. Similarly, discovering local areas or trails while hiking or taking a long walk can also be a great way to stay active and get some fresh air. If you're feeling adventurous, consider visiting an outdoor zipline course where you can test your balance and practice.



LOCAL EVENTS

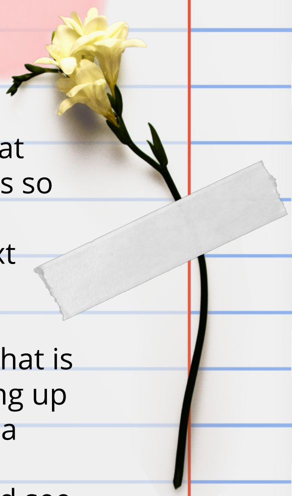
This one is a bit of a catch-all because over the past few summers I've found a lot of exciting events that I want to share with more people. I find checking my county website to be very helpful in finding a list of local events, especially for state and county fairs, and firework showings. Last year, I went to Thompson Park's Fourth of July festival in Monroe and it featured lots of inflatables and food trucks with fun activities for people of all ages. In fact, if you're a foodie you may even want to consider food and food truck festivals themselves; one on my bucket list is Smorgasburg in New York City! Finally, along with festivals and fairs, take a few visits to the beach where you can enjoy boardwalk games, rides, and food with amazing views! I personally prefer to visit Belmar if I'm trying to relax or enjoy the water and opt for Seaside Heights when I want to go on rides or eat beach food.

If you're interested in live entertainment, I definitely recommend watching Plays in the Park in Edison where you can enjoy a musical theatre performance with a live pit orchestra outdoors! I've watched their productions of *Cinderella* and *In the Heights* in the past, and both were really engaging shows. If you're not as interested in live theatre but enjoy movies, a drive-in movie night could be a fun alternative. Middlesex County also hosts several outdoor Music in the Parks events where you can watch live music with your friends, family, and pets among beautiful outdoor scenery.



Ins and Outs for Next Semester:

Being a Lover and a Hater



After another long semester, I have learned a thing or two about what works and what can be left behind. From schoolwork to wellness, it is so important to do things you actually enjoy and save the time of being someone you are not. Here are my top five ins and outs for your next semester.

The first thing to keep in mind is speaking up for yourself. Whether that is telling your truth, asking for help, or saying no to something, speaking up is the first step in getting out of that people pleaser bubble and into a place that you have chosen. Try asking the questions you were too nervous to address or saying no to the plans that you do not like, and see how you grow into someone more confident and motivated.

One thing we need to normalize is getting yourself flowers. There is no need to wait for a boy or a special occasion to enjoy the smell of flowers in your room. Guys never know how to pick out the best flowers anyway. No one would actually choose roses over tulips or lilies, so you can enjoy your favorite flowers even more when you get to pick them out. Buying yourself something as simple as a bunch of flowers might not seem like a big deal, but it's a small act of self-care that reminds you you're worth the effort.

by Greta Vassallo

I cannot remember when it became weird to wear your clothes, but it should not be something that limits you. So, let's normalize "outfit repeating." It is okay not to buy a new special dress for every occasion or something that you are only going to wear once. That outfit that you liked can be worn as many times as you want, even if someone has seen you in it already.

While you are trying new things, there are some you can do to make your day more exciting. Next time you go to your favorite coffee shop, try a new drink or sweet treat. While there is probably nothing wrong with your go-to order, trying something new and liking it can be an easy way to get out of your comfort zone or boost your energy for the day. I always get an iced vanilla chai latte or a strawberry acai lemonade, and I recently just tried the blackberry sage refresher with lemonade. This has become my new favorite drink, and I would have never known if I had not tried to switch it up every once in a while. You don't have to make huge changes to your routine to feel better, sometimes the smallest shifts can make the biggest difference.

It is so important to stay in touch with your friends while you are navigating a busy schedule. You may realize that you have not seen or talked to one of your closest friends in a while, simply because your schedules are so different. Instead of trying to find a time to hang out to catch up or calling at a bad time, you can vlog for your friends. I have been doing this with my long-distance best friend from Portugal for five years now, and I just realized that I can do the same thing to take the pressure off of making time for everyone.

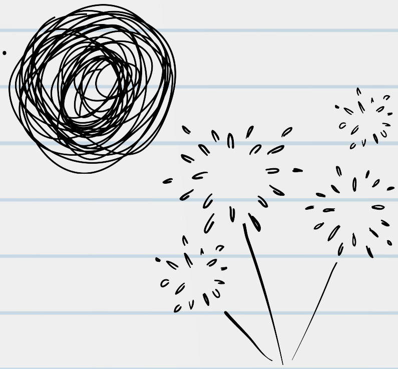
You can talk about your day, something crazy that happened to you, or ask them questions. Then, your friend can watch those videos whenever they have the time to do so.

On that note, the next thing that we can say goodbye to next semester is trying to have a lot of friends. It is so important to emphasize the quality of friends over quantity. This is not to say that you should not try to meet new people, but be aware of who you are bringing into your life. Your core friends are the people who will be there for you the most, so always trying to get people to like you will only cause more stress.

Most people know that you should not compare yourself to others based on the way they look, where they live, or how smart they are. But there are more things we compare ourselves to that we do not even realize, one of them being our Pinterest boards. Have you ever been scrolling on Pinterest and thought, “Why does my life not look like that,” or “why can I not have these things?” That Pinterest board isn’t reality. It's an aesthetic someone curated for clicks, not something to measure your life against. The cute clothes or perfectly designed apartments are only a small glimpse into what someone's life may look like. Pinterest is meant to draw inspiration, not be the blueprint.

It is not good for you to be staying inside all day or not feeling the sun on your face at least once a day. When you do not get that natural vitamin D, you put yourself in a position for limited movement and seasonal depression. So if you have the option to take a walk instead of a drive, take advantage of it. One thing we can leave in this last semester is procrastination.

Everyone does it, but that does not make it any better. You could need or want to do something, but you let being on your phone or some other task stop you from doing it. While this is something I should probably take my own advice on, it is such a bad habit that limits your time and abilities.



The last thing that is so out for next semester is imposter syndrome. If you have worked hard to be where you are, you belong there just as much as the person sitting next to you. I truly believe that opportunities would not be placed in front of you if you were not ready for them. There is no reason to doubt yourself. You are doing yourself a disservice by letting this take over because you start to over analyze who you are. Allowing this anxiety to creep in will deeply affect your confidence and motivation in the future. Recognizing this limitation will help you become more secure in your actions and reassure you that you are meant to be where you are.

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5 CENTS

An Earthbound Misfit, I

By Sahana Iyer

Some of my favorite music lyrics come from an illustrious, 60s, psychedelic rock band. They go as follows: "I can't keep my mind from the circling sky; Tongue tied and twisted; Just an earthbound misfit, I."

There is nothing I feel more acutely than my diminutiveness compared to the vastness of the universe. A 5 foot woman on a tiny, volatile rock that is indifferent to the whims of men. I clung to the nihilistic sentiment, especially in high school, and tried hard to lower the stakes of life events. Why should I make meaning out of nothing? And most importantly, why should I act on this supposed meaning?

The main crux of the matter is that this belief enabled my fundamental laziness to take root. It justified my general apathy towards academic accomplishments, social relationships, and progress (change). As an adolescent, I maintained that human society would neither suffer nor benefit from my contribution. But I always tended to, and still do, think about the broad and immeasurable implications of all phenomena. The details never seemed to matter.

Looking back, I chuckle at the armchair philosopher old me convinced by her understanding of the world-- a result of cognitive dissonance playing its deft hands. Cognitive dissonance occurs due to a chasm between belief and reality. This mental disturbance is ubiquitous, placating all kinds of people: Trump supporters, Harvard rejects, smokers, chastened children, etc. Cognitive dissonance preserves our positive self-image for good and for bad.

A recurrent question that my parents get asked by various individuals from the Indian community is: "Does your daughter have an internship this summer?" It's a question that needles my irritation because the truth is, I have not made a good attempt to seek internships, especially in the industry sector. I tell myself that most corporate internships are only for opportunistic, money-hungry people (who naturally want to build a risk-free, cushy lifestyle). I tell myself that internships perpetuate the ruthless capitalistic system (of course, none of this is entirely true about internships and interns). And I am not opportunistic. So, academia shall be my path.

But even the world of charming professors and fascinating research is not devoid of capitalistic influences. The realm of psychology research has been scrutinized for unethical research practices in the past decade. Studies have not been replicated enough. Researchers have committed or manipulated data. However, behavioral psychology figures and books have taken the nonfiction genre by storm. The question is: to what extent is their research substantive?

Leif Nelson, Uri Simonhson, and John Simmons (decision science academics) solved this question by creating a blog called Data Colada. They looked into unreliable data findings of their peers (as self-appointed whistle-blowers). Their investigations led to a defamation lawsuit by a famous Harvard behavioral scientist, Francesca Gino. She sued them for a whopping $25 million. Ironically, she specialized in "dishonesty research." Much is unknown about the impending legal battle. Yet, this demonstrates that even scientists feel pressurized to exaggerate their research to receive the accolades.

I admit that, upon hearing this news, I feared for the future of my career. Just what am I getting into? A field with no genuine prospects. Then, shame pervaded my very being. I want to go into research because I believe in curiosity. I believe in the pursuit of knowledge. I believe in the beauty of human minds. It takes great courage and steadfast belief to do what Data Colada did.

It will take great resilience and courage for me to embark on the unpredictable path of academia. I need to start visualizing my success. To move on from doubts and distractions, and lazy self-preservation. I can contribute to the betterment of this important field.

To live an apathetic life is a disservice to the incredible capacities of the human mind. I know that now.

Earlier, I mentioned a Pink Floyd song– but, only a part of it. Learning to Fly actually speaks to the strength of the human spirit under the weight of uncertainty.

"A soul in tension that's learning to fly; condition grounded, but determined to try."

artwork by julia burgess

Reconciliation
Ally Garcia

Our Mother,

Forgive us of our trespasses and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from self-wrought disaster.

We imagine You've felt the way
    We've drained You of Your natural lubricant?
    We've scorched Your brown flesh?
    We've contaminated Your fluids?
    We've severed Your earthly limbs and caused You pain for our own gain?
    We've poisoned Your lungs?
    We've indulged in gluttony and greed?
    We've eliminated and endangered other forms of Your creation?
    We've rushed You before You were ready,
    dooming ourselves to hellish heat and
    and Your volatile nature?

Have You? Felt our sins?

In the meantime, we'll convene
fulfill our penance
And better honor Your Body and Blood

columnists

photo by Sahana Iyer

Roses Are Red, My Dating Life Is Blue...

i'm single—what else is new?

from "The RibTickler Club" by Priya Gohil
published 2/14/2025

Well, well, well. Another year, another tear.
But don’t reach for the tissues just yet, because we’re turning those tears into cheers baby. Rib Tickler Radar has detected that being single on Valentine’s Day isn’t a tragedy—it’s the dustiest, finger-lickin’, tongue-plaguing Cheeto resting at the final crevice of a monstrous chip bag. Or, as normal people would call it, a blessing in disguise.

Are you sticking your middle school, post-bullying session fingers into the Mariana Trench, or are you doing the mating dance to your $2.69 Hot Cheetos bag? Do you come to the crumbs, or let the crumbs come to you? That’s what I’m really asking.

Today, we’re taking you through my very own Valentine’s Day Survival Guide: Single Edition. Hang in there, sexy puppies. We’re just hours away from half-off candy and watching couples return to the miserable relationships they pretended didn’t exist on Instagram.

I present to you five ways to embrace your Single Pringle Wouldn’t Wanna Mingle on Valentine’s Day:

#1

vibe with the RA (who's probably just as lonely as you are)

It’s true. Just the other day, I asked my RA to open my pasta jar. He comes into my apartment and manages to open the jar with two rubber bands, more brain than muscle a girl like me would say. As I’m waiting for him to leave, he requests that I let him eat the pasta I was making because the snow was falling harder, and the dining hall was no longer an option. So I let him stay and fed him the pasta. As the snow grew taller, so did our conversations. I’d love to believe he stuck around for me, but let’s be real, it was all about the pasta. It’s good to know I have someone to bother, just one knock away.

#2

if all else fails, ask a Busch goose to be your valentine

Look, I didn’t want to go here, but you can’t resist the Busch charm. I’d argue they’re more committed to the campus than the students are, that excludes the stereotypical Busch boy picking his nose at Allison Road Classroom the other day, fresh out of an astrology lecture. Committed to the boogers and space exploration. Plus, there’s nothing more romantic than a goose sticking his tongue out at you, he's just waiting for a kiss :) If you lose grip, there’s always a squeezable, long, luscious neck to hold onto.

#3

double up on dinner (because who's stopping you?)

I already do this, but Valentine's Day drives it home for me. First, dinner for the body, then second for the soul. In reality, from experience, usually, both dinners hit the body (if you know what I mean, [insert sad face]). Toss out that first-year meal swipe, Kilmer's Market South Tower ramen, and treat yourself to something gourmet. You deserve to be spoiled, even if that means Ronaldo with the red Toyota Corolla is delivering your order.

#4

treat yourself to frozen yogurt at 16 Handles

Before we get into relationships, we must know how to handle the 16. It's simple–grab a cup, choose your favorite fro-yo flavor(s), help yourself to an array of toppings, pay up front, and never ask for the receipt! Savor each bite as you watch couples hold hands through the window—don't worry, the fro-yo will ease the sight. It's fro-yo just for yo!

R
Busch Student Center
R
will you be my valentine?

#5

give yourself a foot bath (because you're worth it)

Relieve your stress & anxiety, relax your muscles, and exfoliate your skin by soaking your feet in essential oils or Epsom salt in warm water. It automatically boosts my mood and my circulation! While you're at it, invite Dan Schneider, he'd love to be your Valentine!!!

On a serious note, I don't pity myself for being single–I love it. I embrace the freedom and welcome the self-discovery that comes with it, which is a crucial part of the college experience. Never feel less than because you're single. It's nothing to fear or be ashamed of. You're not sad, pathetic, or a loser.

Keep your standards high. Know your value. Never settle. Whether you plan on being single forever, aren't ready for a relationship, or recently broke up with your ex, remember: you don't need someone to make you happy. Instead, think of it as someone adding value to your life when you're ready—or, for those who believe like me, when fate chimes in.

Take your time. Choose the right person. Who you choose will shape your life–so my sexy puppies, make it a choice worth making. And now, I'm starting to sound like my mom, so I'm gonna hop off and get back to kissing the Busch geese!

THE 'IN BETWEENNESS'

of Li-Young Lee's "Visions and Interpretations"

from "Poetry in Practice" by Phillip Labelle
published 11/26/2024

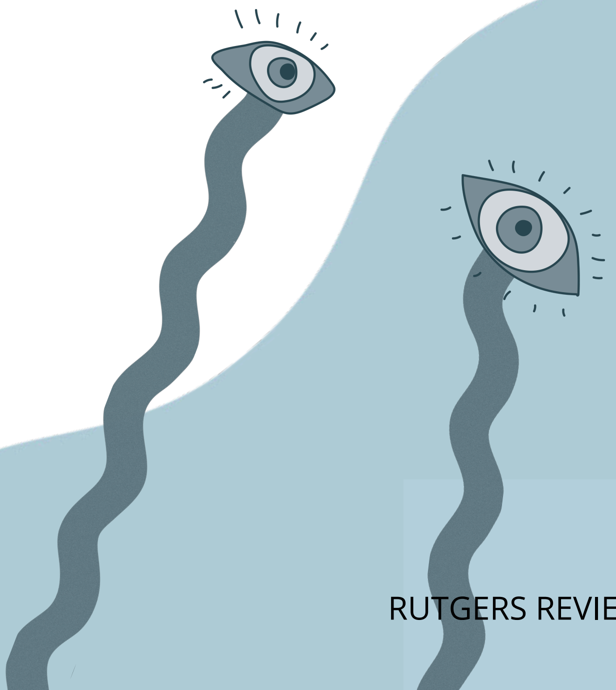
IF I had to narrow down Li-Young Lee's poetry to a simple description, I would say it is discerning. This quality of Lee's poetry is especially present in his poem "Visions and Interpretations," found in his first poetry book, *Rose*, released in 1986. "Visions and Interpretations" is about Lee's father, a topic that much of Lee's poetry centers on. In "Visions and Interpretations," specifically, the poem's speaker is walking up a hill to visit his father's grave.

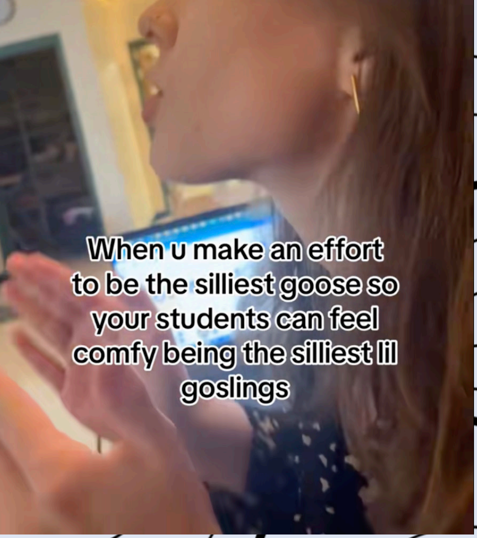
In the second stanza of the poem, Lee captures the subtle moment while resting by a tree halfway up the hill, "It was here, between the anticipation/of exhaustion, and exhaustion" and in this moment, "my father came down to me" (ll. 5-6,8). The parallels of being in the middle of walking up the hill and being in the middle of the way to exhaustion are moments of being 'in between,' and it is in this 'in between' that the ghost of his father comes down to the speaker. The speaker and his father walk up the rest of the hill together but do not acknowledge the grave.

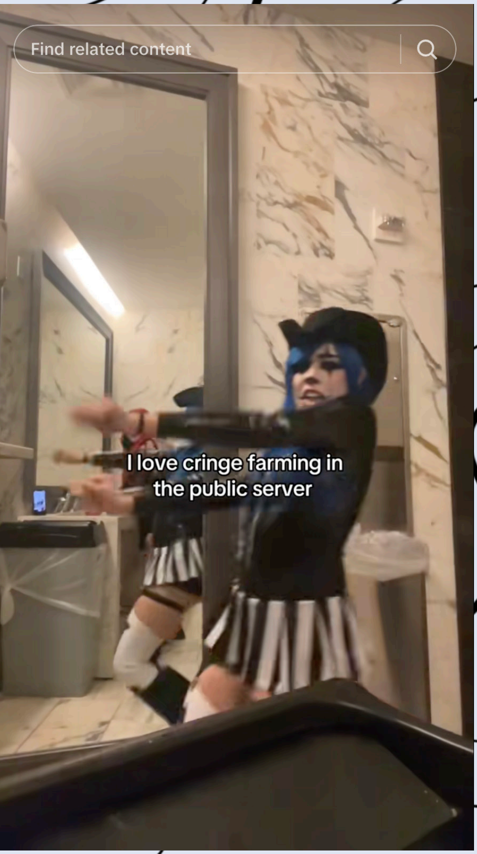
The next stanza takes us to another moment when the speaker sits by the same tree, reading a book. The lines "…I sat down/to read an old book. When I looked up/from the noon-lit page, I saw a vision/of a world about to come, and a world about to go" is another instance of an 'in between'. While taking a break from reading, an 'in between' itself, the speaker sees the in between of a beginning and an end(ll. 13-16). Again we get two 'in betweens' nested within each other, just as in the previous stanza, with the addition of the line "to read an old book. When I looked up" being broken by a period, giving a visual of an 'in between'(l. 14).

Following this, the next stanza starts with the two words "Truth is" signaling a shift, and the speaker goes on to say, "I've not seen my father/since he died…If I carry flowers to them, I do so without their help"(ll. 17-18,20). After this, a new stanza begins, and "Truth is" is repeated and followed by "I came here with my son one day,/and I fell asleep, and dreamed/a dream which …Neither of us understood"(ll. 23-27). Here, the speaker acknowledges in an almost direct address to the reader that the previous stanzas were daydreams of sorts and uses these stanzas that begin with "Truth is" to detail objective reality. The fantasy present in the first part of the poem is lost, the 'in between' dissolves as the facts of the matter must be dealt with, and yet "neither of us understood"(l. 27). The happenings of life do not make much sense on their own, and with this sentiment felt, the poem shifts again.

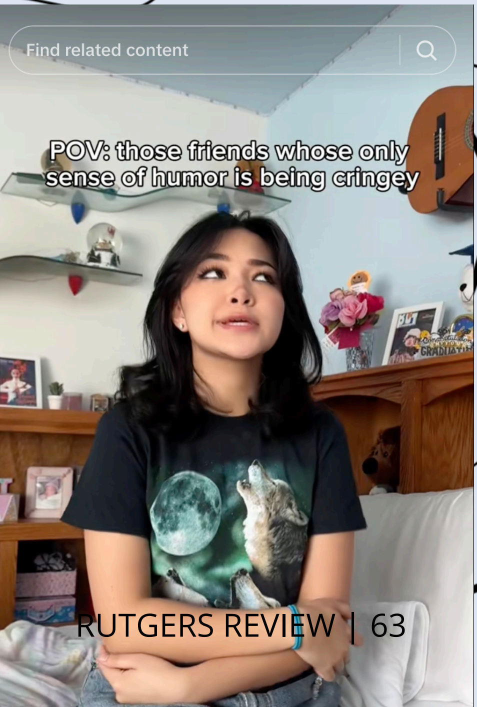
The ninth stanza of the poem is where I feel the true turn takes place when the speaker says, "Even this is not accurate./Let me begin again://Between two griefs, a tree. (ll.29-31). Here, the speaker speaks figuratively, seemingly calling himself and his son "two griefs" (l. 31). Through personifying himself as grief, emotion is brought to the forefront and the poem ends with the four lines "and all of my visions and interpretations/depend on what I see,//and between my eyes is always/the rain, the migrant rain." (ll. 38-41). Bringing emotion and fantasy back, the speaker tells us what is not accurate about objective reality. It lacks emotion and, thus, meaning. The filter of rain between the speaker's eyes, or what can be read as tears, will always affect how the speaker sees reality. Here it can be interpreted that interpretation itself is an 'in between' and it is in the 'in between' that muddled understanding happens.




When u make an effort to be the silliest goose so your students can feel comfy being the silliest lil goslings



I love cringe farming in the public server

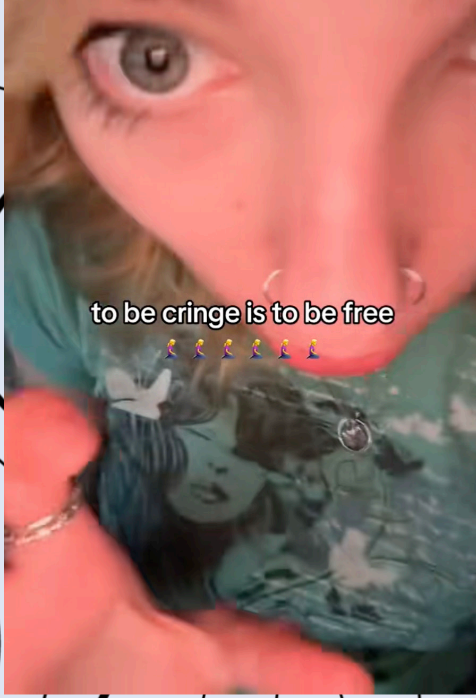


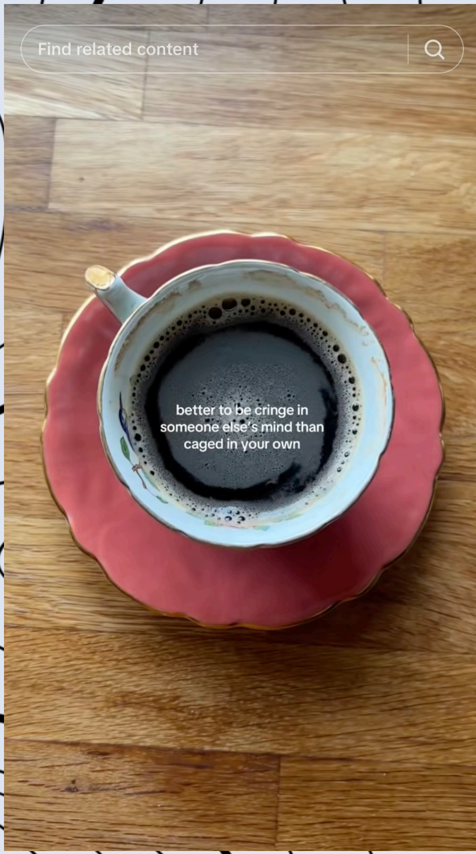
POV: those friends whose only sense of humor is being cringey

Everything is CRINGE and Nothing Matters

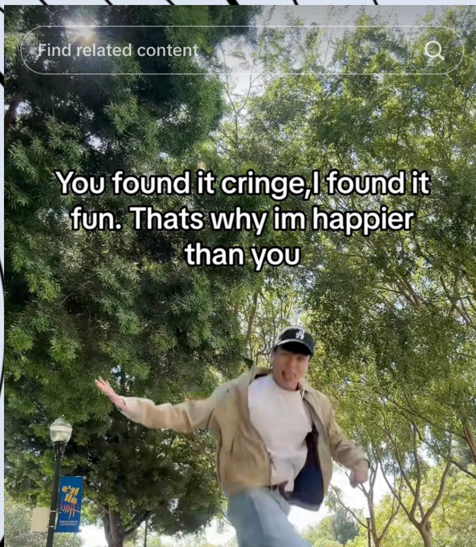
from "Talk the Tok" by Hermeline Berteloot
published 4/10/2025

Somewhere along the way, "**It's not that deep**" became the default response to, well… Everything. The phrase is often tossed around—especially on TikTok—when a conversation starts to lean into vulnerability, seriousness, or even just genuine enthusiasm. While it may seem like a casual, lighthearted saying, the prevalence of its use reflects American society's discomfort with caring too much.


to be cringe is to be free



better to be cringe in someone else's mind than caged in your own



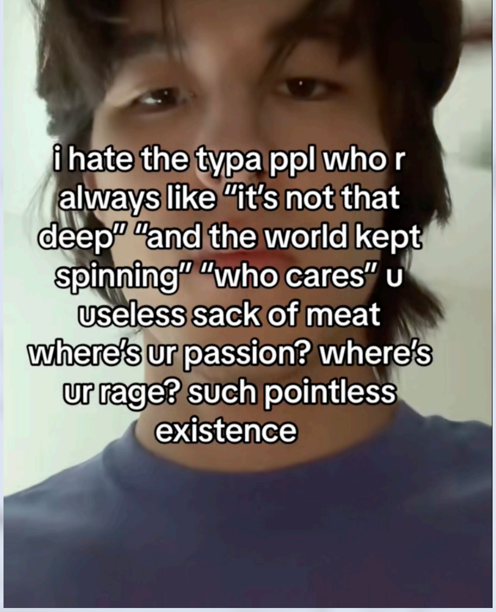
You found it cringe,I found it fun. Thats why im happier than you

#Anti-Intellectualism & Apathy in Online Culture

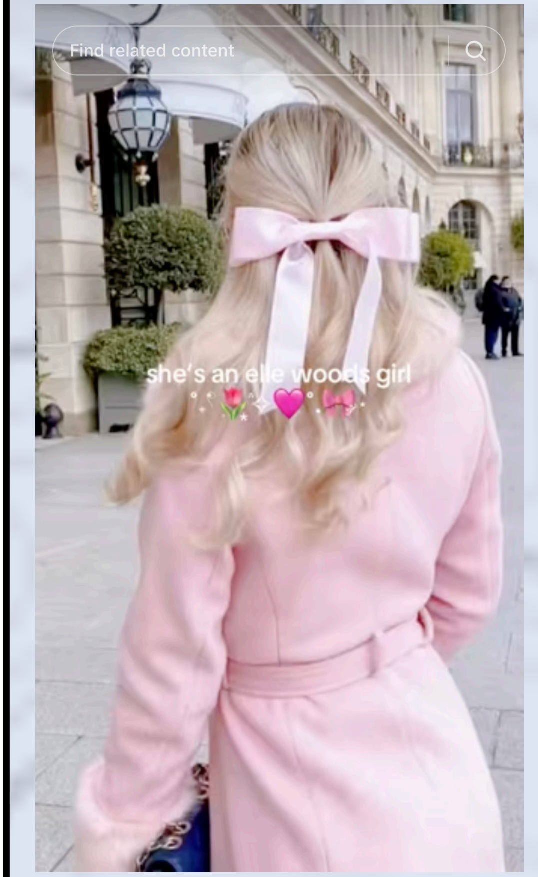
In my column "My Predictions for 2025 Trends", I wrote about how 'surface-level' BookTok's "lack of variety suggest[s] a growing preference for comfort over challenge and simplicity over depth—a pattern that reflects the broader rise of anti-intellectualism in America." However, the apathy toward critical conversations isn't limited to how we talk about books. It's part of a culture shift—across the U.S and arguably the world—that favors amusement over introspection and simplicity over nuance.

Some creators have started to push back. @poison_bf on TikTok posted a video critiquing the casual use of "it's not that deep" and "who cares," asking those who often use these comebacks, "where's ur passion? where's ur rage?" He expresses that living with such mindsets is "such a pointless existence."

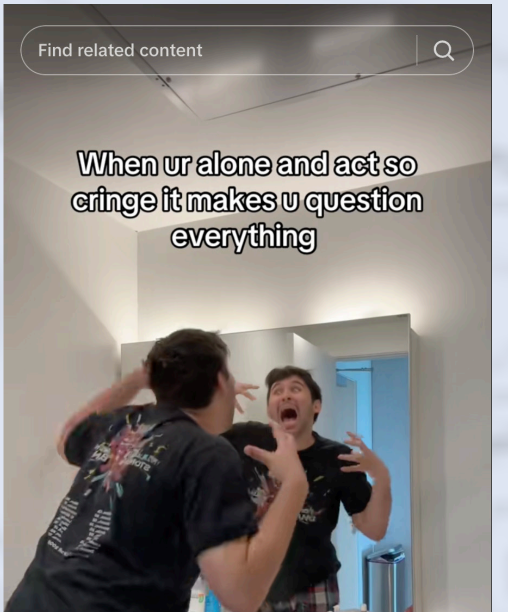
Similarly, @nonathango suggests that people who respond to anything with "it's not that serious" have "gone through life unchallenged." He explains that these people often shut down anyone who thinks critically or "speaks with some thought behind it" because they don't understand, and instead default to phrases like "it's not that serious." Like @poison_bf, @nonathango believes that living this way "must be an extremely unfulfilling life."



i hate the typa ppl who r always like "it's not that deep" "and the world kept spinning" "who cares" u useless sack of meat where's ur passion? where's ur rage? such pointless existence



she's an elle woods girl



When ur alone and act so cringe it makes u question everything

#The Decline of the Smart Girl

This shift in how we talk—or don't talk—about what matters has also reshaped who younger generations see as role models. In the earlier days of social media, inspiration often came from fictional characters on TV and in movies. Now, it's more likely to come from influencers and content creators. That isn't inherently negative, but the values and behaviors being celebrated have changed.

Remember iconic early 2000s characters like Rory Gilmore from Gilmore Girls and Elle Woods from Legally Blonde? Both were celebrated for being driven, thoughtful, and unafraid to care about the things they loved. While, they're referenced in TikTok for aesthetics purposes, it seems like for younger generations—especially Gen Alpha—they no longer feel aspirational.

It's not that these characters have entirely faded from popular culture, but they feel increasingly distant. They existed in a world untouched by social media, where reading books in public or speaking up in class was admirable, not performative. Today, everything is content waiting to be used for social media. Every interest is up for scrutiny. Everything is cringe.

#The Fear of Being Cringe

Being labeled as cringe is something to be avoided at all costs—even if it leads to the complete loss of identity. However, a trend has been circulating on TikTok, where people post clips of themselves dancing, painting, or just simply enjoying having fun, paired with the caption: You found it cringe, I found it fun. That's why I'm happier than you. These videos counter the culture of mockery that discourages people from expressing themselves and the constant need to be nonchalant.

TikToker @horacegold puts this trend into words, saying: "The fear of being cringe, limits people from actually living their lives." When we make choices based on how others might perceive us, we end up living, as he calls it, a "grey, meaningless life"—one shaped by other people's expectations rather than our own interests.

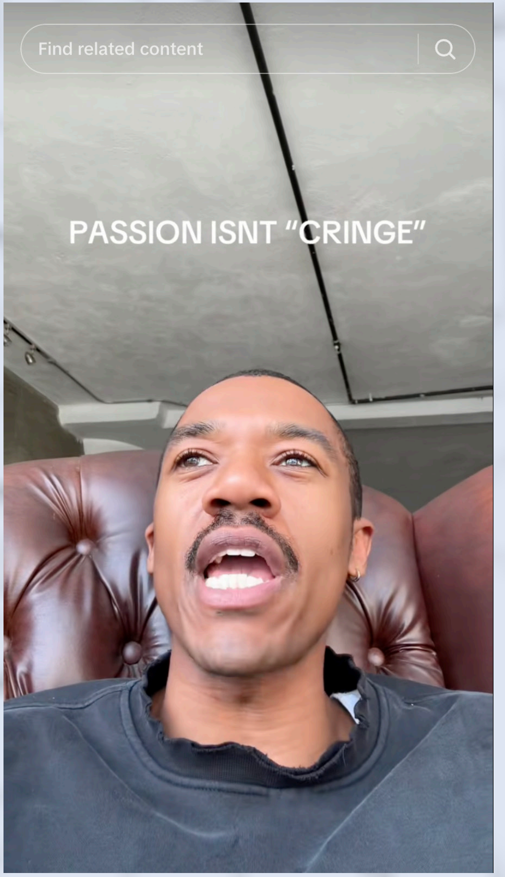
#Yes, It Is That Deep

So maybe it's not that deep. But also—maybe it is.

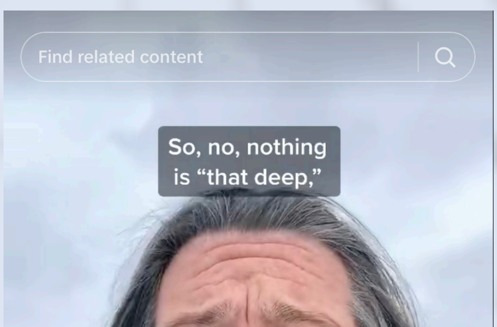
As Abraham Piper (@abrahampiper on TikTok) puts it: "Of course it's not that deep. Nothing is. But also… yes, it is, and everything is." He explains that part of being human is choosing what matters. We "have to pick some things that matter," because we have "the unlikely and unique capacity to think things through, to ponder."

Sure, in the grand scheme of things, we're just one species on one planet, but that doesn't mean we should go through life as if nothing matters. The fear of being cringe has convinced us to stay quiet, to disengage, to stop thinking too hard, however, as Piper reminds us, "it's core to who we are to treat things like they're profound."

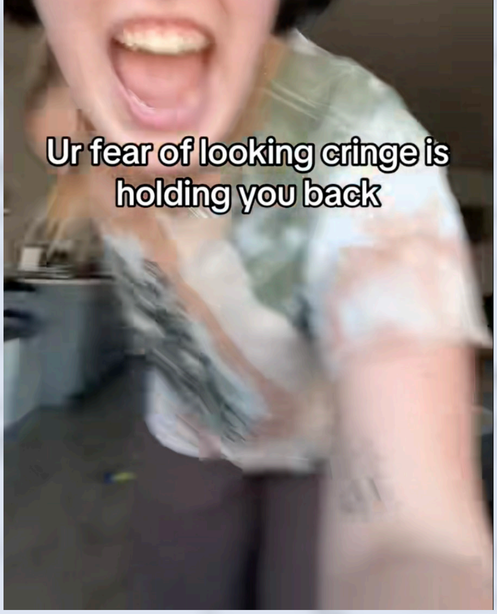
So stop trying so hard to be unbothered. Pick up a hobby. Post the video. Talk about the book that made you cry. Let people think it's cringe. Let them think you care too much. At the end of the day—**it's really not that deep.**



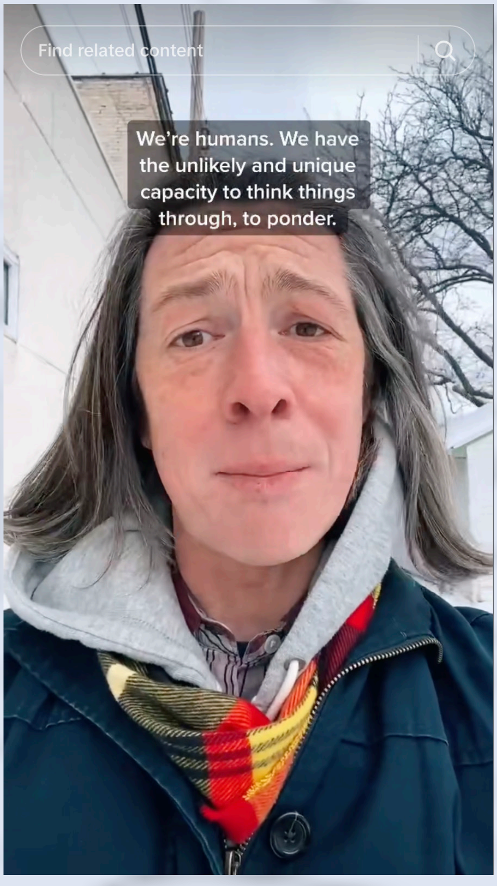
PASSION ISNT "CRINGE"



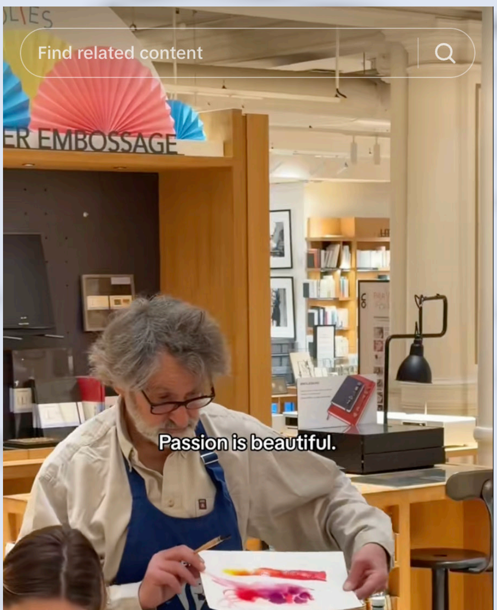
So, no, nothing is "that deep,"



Ur fear of looking cringe is holding you back



We're humans. We have the unlikely and unique capacity to think things through, to ponder.



Passion is beautiful.

FROM "ONE IDEA AT A TIME"

POLITICIANS & the Problem with Charismatic Authority

by **Diya Nathan**
February 10, 2025

Possibly one of the most bipartisan experiences throughout history is learning about a politician and going: "Now how did they get elected?"

It's not an unique experience to question how someone could have risen to power. We can look at both the politicians of the past and the people who currently hold office, and debate how exactly they got there. Especially when their rhetoric is illogical and rooted in hate. And while it's easy to just assume everyone who voted for them believes the same, that would be an oversimplification of the situation. To really understand how they got power, it's important to understand power itself.

In the early twentieth century, sociologist and political economist Max Weber defined power as the ability that an actor (be it an individual or organization) would be able to carry out their own goals regardless of resistance. To narrow down his broad definition, he identified power in three interconnected forms: **rational-legal**, **traditional**, and **charismatic**.

Rational-legal authority is based on the brief that a leader genuinely has the power to issue rules based on a legal system. In contrast, traditional authority stems from custom or tradition and often exists solely because people have accepted it has always been there. It's the driving force behind monarchies, but also perpetuates social dynamics like the patriarchy.

Charismatic authority describes how individuals can garner power through personality, ideology, or as the name states, charisma. We see it exist in high schools with the idea of popularity and in social movements through the "faces" of an organization. While traditional and rational-legal authority relies on some sort of pre-appointed system to imbue power, charismatic authority relies solely on the individual who seeks it. So naturally it's the most common. Moreover, it's how most politicians get their start.

Through campaigns and debates, politicians take on different methods to appeal to voters. As charismatic authority grows, an emotional connection between the politician and citizens emerges–a bond that translates into votes when the time comes.

When a politician takes office, their charismatic authority turns into rational-legal authority. It takes their power from a social relationship to a defined position, and gives them far more power to exercise itself. In the most extreme cases, this rational-legal authority can turn into traditional authority, if the politician takes steps to form a totalitarian state.

So when it comes to politics, this is exactly where the danger of charismatic authority lies.

While countries across the world are rapidly becoming more divided in terms of the political right and left, there remains a middle ground of voters who aren't vocally aligning themselves with either side. So when it comes to politicians who align themselves with hateful ideology, it's not the hate that draws the middle in, but rather the policies they promote. It shouldn't be surprising that politicians who spew hate talk equally about their plans for the economy. Nearly every questionable politician plays on some idea like this. It is exactly how they tip the power in their favor.

> **So why do bad people get elected? It's because something they said sounded good.**

It is the universal similarity among some of the worst people who have held office, but it's also completely avoidable. It may feel easier to overlook hateful beliefs and questionable ideology for the sake of the few things that you think will directly benefit you, but in the long run it puts people in office who will one day become sore spots for nations. It's easy to look back and wonder what a politician did to get in power, but it goes without saying, for the sake of peace and stability, it's far more important to recognize these things in real time. It is crucial to understand that politicians will play into your support to only further their own agenda in the end. Like Weber shows, power can morph from one form to another, so it's important to make sure only the right people have it in the first place.

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